

CAPITOL STUDIES

FEBRUARY 15, 2023 • WEEK 6



JOSEPH: THE CIVIL SERVANT FROM EGYPT

Contents

Joseph Excels in Duties	2
Joseph Explains Dreams	3
Joseph Experiences Disappointments	3
During Adversity...	4
Conclusion	5
About Capitol Studies	6



Verse of the Week

Genesis 40:8

Then they said to him, “We have had a dream and there is no one to interpret it.” Then Joseph said to them, “Do not interpretations belong to God? Tell it to me, please.”

Faithful Prisoner to Dream Interpreter



BECAUSE OF JOSEPH’S OBEDIENCE to the Lord, he finds himself in a most difficult situation. Surely his circumstances are difficult to *endure*, but how much harder it must be to *understand* them! He has obeyed and now is being sorely punished. He has protected the honor of Potiphar’s wife only to have his own reputation morally marred. He has been free to serve God through serving Potiphar in a role of nearly unlimited privilege. Now he is bound, confined, and conscripted. The memory of his boyhood dreams must have tormented Joseph’s soul. Would God yet fulfill those dreams? Had he failed God in some way? Had he responded correctly?

It is helpful to remind ourselves of the initial audience for this book. Moses is writing this record for people who are wandering in the wilderness. Time after time the people of God come to points in which their own resources and abilities are exhausted or restricted. In their extreme thirst, hunger, or danger, they are cast completely upon Jehovah God to provide for them. The extremity of their circumstances tests their belief in the words of God that He will bring them into the land of promise. Joseph is initially placed in a circumstance where he cannot move. He is bound. Joseph is helpless unless God intervenes in some way. God still allows His people to be put in situations where they are utterly helpless apart from Him.

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INTRODUCTION

Joseph gives us a wonderful example of someone whose trial results in a purer faith. He is the first in Scripture to be incarcerated for righteousness. He goes to prison, but the Lord goes there, too. God's presence does not leave him when he comes to a strange land. It attends him in the house where he is a bondservant. It follows him to the dungeon, and when the irons enter his soul (Psalm 105:18), it preserves him from sinking under his calamities. It does not indeed bring him out of the dungeon as soon as he is cast into it, but it soon lightens his yoke. God is mindful to be for Joseph what He will always be for His persecuted children: "When you pass through the waters, **I will be with you**; and through the rivers they will not overflow you" (Isaiah 43:2).

"Whenever you get into a prison of circumstances, be on the watch. Prisons are rare places for seeing things. It was in prison that Pastor John Bunyan saw his wondrous allegory, *Pilgrim's Progress*, and Paul met the Lord, and John looked through heaven's open door, and Joseph saw God's mercy. God has no chance to show His mercy to some of us except when we are in sore sorrow. The night is the time to see the stars."¹ **We will see how Joseph trusted fully in and traced the design of God.**

I. JOSEPH EXCELS IN DUTIES

Genesis 40:1-4

Then it came about after these things, the cupbearer and the baker for the king of Egypt offended their lord, the king of Egypt. ²Pharaoh was furious with his two officials, the chief cupbearer and the chief baker.

³So he put them in confinement in the house of the captain of the bodyguard, in the jail, the same place where Joseph was imprisoned.

⁴The captain of the bodyguard put Joseph in charge of them, and he took care of them; and they were in confinement for some time.²

We don't know how much time passes, but after a while two new prisoners join Joseph: Pharaoh's cupbearer and chief baker. These were important men in Pharaoh's court. The cupbearer was more than the man who tasted the wine for poison before Pharaoh drank it; he was always with the king and was one of his advisors and confidants. The baker ensured the quality of all food served at Pharaoh's table. These men somehow offend Pharaoh and end up with Joseph in the dungeon.

Moses carefully includes details that reveal to us that the hand of God is working through the hands of unbelieving men, putting His servant in exactly the right place. Of all the prisons in the land, Joseph is put into "the jail where the king's prisoners were confined" (Gen. 39:20), and this prison is within the bounds of Potiphar's house (Gen. 40:3). One indication of the Lord's presence is the favor that Joseph finds with the keeper of the prison. The keeper would have been under Potiphar who is captain of the guard (Gen. 39:1; 40:3). The keeper is probably a man of rough, violent character who does not normally demonstrate affection for his charges. Yet God puts it in his heart to be kindly disposed toward Joseph and to place his confidence in Joseph.



II. JOSEPH EXPLAINS DREAMS

Genesis 40:5-14

Then the cupbearer and the baker for the king of Egypt, who were confined in jail, both had a dream the same night, each man with his own dream and each dream with its own interpretation. ⁶When Joseph came to them in the morning and observed them, behold, they were dejected. ⁷He asked Pharaoh's officials who were with him in confinement in his master's house, "Why are your faces so sad today?" ⁸Then they said to him, "We have had a dream and there is no one to interpret it." Then Joseph said to them, "Do not interpretations belong to God? Tell it to me, please." ⁹So the chief cupbearer told his dream to Joseph, and said to him, "In my dream, behold, there was a vine in front of me; ¹⁰and on the vine were three branches. And as it was budding, its blossoms came out, and its clusters produced ripe grapes. ¹¹Now Pharaoh's cup was in my hand; so I took the grapes and squeezed them into Pharaoh's cup, and I put the cup into Pharaoh's hand." ¹²Then Joseph said to him, "This is the interpretation of it: the three branches are three days; ¹³within three more days Pharaoh will lift up your head and restore you to your office; and you will put Pharaoh's cup into his hand according to your former custom when you were his cupbearer. ¹⁴Only keep me in mind when it goes well with you, and please do me a kindness by mentioning me to Pharaoh and get me out of this house."

During his adversity Joseph continues to acknowledge God in all His ways (Proverbs 3:6). Despite his own less than desirable circumstances, Joseph does not allow his view of God to be minimized. When the two chief officials meet him in the prison, Joseph confidently declares to them that God has the answer to their puzzling riddles (Gen. 40:8). Speaking of God was a habit with Joseph. His speech about God when considered all together demonstrates a breadth of knowledge of the character of God that is remarkable. He isn't being arrogant, but as Donald Grey Barnhouse puts it, his reply is rather "the simplicity of a child who knows just where his father is and how to reach him."³ Joseph walks so closely with God that he automatically mentions His name when these men tell him their problem. And he has such trust in God that his answer assumes that God will reveal to him the meaning of the dreams.

III. JOSEPH EXPERIENCES DISAPPOINTMENTS

Genesis 40:15-23

"For I was in fact kidnapped from the land of the Hebrews, and even here I have done nothing that they should have put me into the dungeon." ¹⁶When the chief baker saw that he had interpreted favorably, he said to Joseph, "I also saw in my dream, and behold, there were three baskets of white bread on my head; ¹⁷and in the top basket there were some of all sorts of baked food for Pharaoh, and the birds were eating them out of the basket on my head." ¹⁸Then Joseph answered and said, "This is its interpretation: the three baskets are three days; ¹⁹within three more days Pharaoh will lift up your head





from you and will hang you on a tree, and the birds will eat your flesh off you.”²⁰ Thus it came about on the third day, which was Pharaoh’s birthday, that he made a feast for all his servants; and he lifted up the head of the chief cupbearer and the head of the chief baker among his servants.²¹ He restored the chief cupbearer to his office, and he put the cup into Pharaoh’s hand;²² but he hanged the chief baker, just as Joseph had interpreted to them.²³ Yet the chief cupbearer did not remember Joseph, but forgot him.

Joseph suffers because he is a **forgotten man**. This may be the most painful circumstance of all. Joseph befriends his fellow prisoner, offers him a word of hope from the God of hope, and yet that is all forgotten.

IV. DURING ADVERSITY...

A. Remember That God Will Never Leave You

In Joseph’s case, it is during times of crisis that the Lord’s presence becomes the most evident, though initially it seems to be just the opposite. God must be faithful to His Word, or else He sacrifices His integrity. In times of circumstances which naturally bring despair, we must answer with hope. Our tendency is to look at the chains and to believe that the chains are the trial. But God is simply using the chains to try our belief in whether He is trustworthy. “For He Himself has said, ‘I will never desert you, nor will I ever forsake you’” (Hebrews 13:5b).

B. Acknowledge God and Submit Yourself to His Will

If Joseph was submissive to God prior to his imprisonment, he became even more so once he was imprisoned. The circumstances demanded it. The chains demanded it. His prolonged stay demanded it. His forgotten request demanded it. Joseph never once is heard to complain audibly. Each successive disappointment in the trial yielded another opportunity to increase his submission to God.

C. Look for Evidence That God Is Refining You

Joseph demonstrates an unusual ability to detect God. A trial will often force us to see God, as the intensity of a trial causes many of the things that ordinarily distract us from Him to fall into their rightful place. This allows us to see the hand of God more clearly. **The Divine purpose for all Joseph’s adversity was to bring him to the place where he could be elevated.** The envy of Joseph’s brethren, the lasciviousness of his mistress, the misconduct and dreams of his fellow prisoners, and the ingratitude of one of them, all bad in themselves, yet all meeting, strange to think, in one point: the elevation of Joseph to be the second person in all the land of Egypt, inferior to the king alone. Remove one link, and the chain is broken.⁴

D. Remember God’s Timetable May Be Different from Yours

After Joseph interprets the butler’s dream, Joseph makes a simple request of the butler that the butler might inform Pharaoh of Joseph and help



him get out of the prison (Gen. 40:14). Joseph clearly saw his meeting of the butler and the butler's coming restoration as a means by which God could fulfill His word to Joseph. The butler would not remember Joseph's request for two full years. This was all in the design of God (Gen. 40:14, 23; 41:9).

E. Continue to Walk in Integrity

When Joseph was confronted with the disappointing interpretation of the baker's dream, he does not fail to speak the truth to this man. Since the man was going to die in three days anyway, Joseph could have justified telling him some good news simply to encourage him in his last days. (Joseph could have simply relied on the play on words indicated in Gen. 40:13, 19, "lift up your head." Having explained what it meant in the case of the butler, Joseph could have simply said to the baker that God was going to lift up his head also without explaining how his fate was different than that of the butler.) Two years later when the butler does remember Joseph, he recalls that Joseph interpreted both dreams correctly. He had not only watched to see if Joseph's interpretation was correct in his own case but also in the baker's case. Had Joseph faltered because the report was negative, his integrity would have been undermined in the butler's mind. The butler reports that Joseph had interpreted both dreams exactly as they had been fulfilled.

F. Remember the Character of God and Rest on His Word

Joseph's willingness to interpret the dreams and to attribute their meaning to God indicates that he still believed his own dreams. He clung to the promises of God.

CONCLUSION

Of all the lessons on Joseph, this one is probably the most practically oriented. Unquestionably, there are times God chooses to put His people in places where we have little room to maneuver. Faithful obedience rises out of a heart that attempts to remember things from God's point of view. When we remember the character of God, even when we are not sure of His actions, we can not only bear up under the confining circumstances, but our souls can prosper.

Pastor Arin Hess



Theme Verse

Philippians 4:8

Finally, brethren,
whatever is **true**,
whatever is **honorable**,
whatever is **right**,
whatever is **pure**,
whatever is **lovely**,
whatever is of
good repute,
if there is any
excellence
and if anything is
worthy of praise,
dwell on these things.

Questions to Consider:

- How would you counsel a Christian who was disappointed with God? What steps should he/she take?
- How would you answer a skeptic who said that hoping in God is just “pie in the sky when you die” wish fulfillment?
- How can a believer who has a consistently negative, cynical attitude develop a proper joyful attitude?
- How can a believer who has been through a terrible tragedy, such as the loss of his family, keep from doubting the sovereign goodness of God?⁵

FOOTNOTES

1. Frederick B. Meyer, *Joseph: Beloved, Hated, Exalted*, Emerald Books, 1995, pp. 57-58.
2. Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations are from the *New American Standard Bible (NASB)*, 1995 update.
3. Donald Grey Barnhouse, *Genesis*, Vol. 2, Zondervan, 1971, p. 175.
4. John A. James, *Addresses to Young Men*, Solo Deo Gloria, 2020, pp. 175-76.
5. Questions from Pastor Steven J. Cole, <https://bible.org/seriespage/lesson-68-high-hopes-no-hope-god-genesis-401-23>.

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