

The Book of Genesis

Lesson 23: Joseph Interprets Dreams and Rises to Power -- Genesis 40:1-41:57

Joseph is still in prison, still innocent, still forgotten, when two of Pharaoh's officials are thrown into the same dungeon and, on the same night, each has a troubling dream. And Joseph, the slave, the prisoner, the man with every reason to be bitter, notices that they look sad, and he cares enough to ask why. Even here, at the bottom, he is attentive to others. When they tell him their dreams, he says something that is the key to his whole life: "Do not interpretations belong to God?" Whatever gift Joseph has, he knows exactly Whose it is. He points away from himself and toward heaven.

He interprets the dreams truly: the cupbearer will be restored, the baker will be executed. And he makes one humble request of the cupbearer, "Remember me when it is well with you." The cupbearer is restored, just as Joseph said. And then comes one of the quietest, most painful sentences in the Bible: "Yet the chief cupbearer did not remember Joseph, but forgot him." Two more years pass. Two more years in a dungeon, forgotten by the one man who could have helped. We are not told how Joseph spent them, but we know this: God had not forgotten, even when everyone else did.

Then, in a single day, everything changes. Pharaoh has dreams no one can interpret, the cupbearer finally remembers, and Joseph is rushed from the dungeon, shaved and clothed, to stand before the most powerful man on earth. And when Pharaoh says, "I have heard that you can interpret dreams," Joseph does not seize the moment for himself. He says, "It is not in me; God will give Pharaoh a favorable answer." Even with his freedom on the line, he gives God the glory. He interprets the dreams, seven years of plenty followed by seven years of famine, and then wisely counsels Pharaoh to store up grain. And Pharaoh, astonished, makes the Hebrew slave the second most powerful man in Egypt.

From the pit to the prison to the palace, thirteen long years from the day his brothers sold him, Joseph rises. And the boy who once flaunted his dreams is now a humble man who gives God the credit, names his sons for God's faithfulness ("God has made me forget all my hardship" and "God has made me fruitful in the land of my affliction"), and uses his power not to take revenge but to save lives, gathering grain that will one day feed the very brothers who betrayed him. Read this passage and watch the patient, sovereign hand of God: working through delays and dungeons and forgotten promises, never early, never late, placing His servant exactly where He needs him, exactly when the world needs saving.

Group Discussion: Twice Joseph deflected credit to God, saying, "Do not interpretations belong to God?" and "It is not in me; God will give Pharaoh a favorable answer" (40:8; 41:16). What

does this reveal about Joseph's character after all his suffering, and what would it look like for us to give God the glory like this?

Personal Reflection: Joseph waited thirteen years from the pit to the palace, including two more years in prison after the cupbearer forgot him. Where are you in a season of waiting, obscurity, or feeling forgotten? How do you keep trusting God and remaining faithful when the wait is long?

Read Genesis 40:1–41:57

Study Questions

1. When asked to interpret dreams, Joseph repeatedly pointed away from himself to God: “Do not interpretations belong to God?” and “It is not in me; God will give Pharaoh a favorable answer” (40:8; 41:16). What does this teach us about humility and about giving God the glory for our gifts and abilities?
2. When you do something well or experience success, do you tend to take the credit or give it to God? What would it look like to genuinely acknowledge God as the source of your abilities and your good outcomes?
3. After Joseph interpreted the cupbearer's dream, the cupbearer forgot him for two more years, yet Joseph's exaltation came at exactly the right moment (40:23–41:14). What does this long delay, and its sudden end, teach us about God's providence and His timing (compare 1 Peter 5:6)?
4. Where are you tempted to grow discouraged or to take matters into your own hands because God's timing seems too slow? How can you wait on God's timing with trust rather than frustration?
5. Long before the palace, Joseph served faithfully and attentively even in prison, caring about two troubled officials when he had troubles of his own (40:6–7). What does this teach us about being faithful and trustworthy in small, hidden, or hard places?
6. How faithfully do you serve God and others in your present situation, even when it is unnoticed, unrewarded, or far from where you hoped to be? Where might God be calling you to greater faithfulness right where you are?
7. Through Joseph's God-given wisdom, Egypt stored up grain and was prepared to preserve many lives through the coming famine (41:33–57). What does this teach us about how God uses people's gifts, wisdom, and positions to provide for and bless others?
8. How are you using the position, resources, abilities, and influence God has given you to serve and bless others, rather than only yourself? Where could you be a better steward of what God has entrusted to you?
9. Looking at the whole sweep, God sovereignly used dreams, gifts, timing, and even a forgotten promise to bring Joseph from the pit to the palace at exactly the moment needed to save many lives, and Joseph named his sons for God turning his affliction into fruitfulness (41:51–52). What does this teach us about trusting God's providence and timing, even in delays and suffering we do not understand (compare Romans 8:28)?

10. Look back over the whole passage. Name one specific way God is calling you to give Him the glory, to wait on His timing, to be faithful where you are, and to trust His providence over your life.

Now or Later

Reflect on these passages: 1 Peter 5:6, humbling ourselves so that God may exalt us at the proper time; Romans 8:28, God working all things together for good; Genesis 45:5–8, God sending Joseph ahead to preserve life; Psalm 105:16–22, Joseph's story and how the word of the Lord tested him until it came to pass; Daniel 2:20–23, God who reveals mysteries and gives wisdom.