

## **Joseph in the Prison** **Genesis 40**

Of the seven great figures in the book of Genesis whose biographies we have studied, Adam, Abel, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph, Joseph's story is the longest. He's also one of the best types, or foreshadowings of Christ, in the Bible.

Think about Christ as the 2<sup>nd</sup> Adam (1 Cor 15:45).

Here, Joseph is doing what Adam did not do.

**Genesis 2:15** - *The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it.*

**Genesis 39:5** - *From the time that he made him overseer in his house and over all that he had, the LORD blessed the Egyptian's house for Joseph's sake; the blessing of the LORD was on all that he had, in house and field.*

**Genesis 40:23** - *The keeper of the prison paid no attention to anything that was in Joseph's charge, because the LORD was with him. And whatever he did, the LORD made it succeed.*

What makes the difference?

Genesis 39:2 – *The Lord was with Joseph...*

Genesis 39:21-23 - *But the LORD was with Joseph and showed him steadfast love and gave him favor in the sight of the keeper of the prison. <sup>22</sup> And the keeper of the prison put Joseph in charge of all the prisoners who were in the prison. Whatever was done there, he was the one who did it. <sup>23</sup> The keeper of the prison paid no attention to anything that was in Joseph's charge, because the LORD was with him. And whatever he did, the LORD made it succeed.*

And so this chapter begins with Joseph in prison for a crime he did not commit.

### **First: Joseph, the Cupbearer, the Chief Baker, and Dreams 1-4**

- a) We don't know what the cupbearer (wine) and chief baker (food) did, but they displeased Pharaoh.

They oversaw everything Pharaoh ate and drank. They basically preserved his life. It is interesting that the men in charge of Pharaoh's food can't successfully do that, but in prison, they meet the man who will one day successfully protect all of Egypt's food.

They were there, in prison by Pharaoh's displeasure. Perhaps he feared for his life. But they were there by God's pleasure.

IMP: Gen 39:23 is the last time we see God mentioned in the background of the Joseph story. People will make reference to him, but he's not seen as overseeing Joseph's life. But he is not absent. God has reminded us twice in that chapter, once at the beginning, 39:2, and once at the end, 39:21, that "*the Lord was with Joseph.*"

Think of **John 19:18 - There they crucified him, and with him two others, one on either side, and Jesus between them.**

b) Joseph was put in charge of them.

Note: v 4 "The captain of the guard" put Joseph in charge of them.

Genesis 39:1 - *Now Joseph had been brought down to Egypt, and Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh, the captain of the guard...*

c) They were in prison for 'some time.

V4b - Even in prison, Joseph was faithful to Potiphar – "*...and he attended them.*"

**IMP:** How like Christ, even in prison, serving us.

### **Second: Dreaming Dreams 5-8**

a) The dreams 5

- God spoke to the pagan ruler Abimelech in a dream (Genesis 20:3).
- God spoke to Jacob in dreams (Genesis 28:12, 31:11).
- God spoke to Laban in a dream (Genesis 31:24).
- God spoke to the Midianite in a dream (Judges 7:13).
- God spoke to Solomon in a dream (1 Kings 3:5).
- God spoke to Nebuchadnezzar in a dream (Daniel 2:1).
- God spoke to Daniel in a dream (Daniel 7:1).
- God spoke to Joseph in dreams (Matthew 1:20, 2:13, 2:22).

- God spoke to Pilate's wife in a dream (Matthew 27:19).

*Ecclesiastes 5:3 - For a dream comes with much business*

*Ecclesiastes 5:7 - For when dreams increase and words grow many, there is vanity; but God is the one you must fear.*

*Deuteronomy 13:1-5 - If a prophet or a dreamer of dreams arises among you and gives you a sign or a wonder, <sup>2</sup> and the sign or wonder that he tells you comes to pass, and if he says, 'Let us go after other gods,' which you have not known, 'and let us serve them,' <sup>3</sup> you shall not listen to the words of that prophet or that dreamer of dreams. For the LORD your God is testing you, to know whether you love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul. <sup>4</sup> You shall walk after the LORD your God and fear him and keep his commandments and obey his voice, and you shall serve him and hold fast to him. <sup>5</sup> But that prophet or that dreamer of dreams shall be put to death, because he has taught rebellion against the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt and redeemed you out of the house of slavery, to make you leave the way in which the LORD your God commanded you to walk. So you shall purge the evil from your midst.*

*Jeremiah 23:25-27 - I have heard what the prophets have said who prophesy lies in my name, saying, 'I have dreamed, I have dreamed!' <sup>26</sup> How long shall there be lies in the heart of the prophets who prophesy lies, and who prophesy the deceit of their own heart, <sup>27</sup> who think to make my people forget my name by their dreams that they tell one another, even as their fathers forgot my name for Baal?*

*Hebrews 1:1-2 - Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, <sup>2</sup> but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son,*

*2 Timothy 3:13-17 - ...evil people and impostors will go on from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived. <sup>14</sup> But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it <sup>15</sup> and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. <sup>16</sup> All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, <sup>17</sup> that the man of God<sup>[b]</sup> may be complete, equipped for every good work.*

- b) The lack of interpretations 6-8a

V 7 – Jesus enters into our sadness

*Isaiah 53:4 – Surely he has born our griefs and carried our sorrows...*

- c) The God of interpretation 8b – *“Do not interpretations belong to God?”*

### **Third: The Cupbearer’s Dream 9-15**

- a) The cupbearer’s dream 9-11
- b) Joseph’s interpretation 12-13
- c) Joseph’s request 14-15

*‘kindness’ = hesed* – The cupbearer is unkind to Joseph and forgets him, but God’s steadfast lovingkindness remains

*Hesed* is found about 250 times in the Old Testament. It expresses an essential part of God’s character and is so expansive in its definition that it is untranslatable as one single English word. This is why the Bible uses a multitude of words to describe it: “mercy,” “kindness,” “goodness,” “faithfulness,” “loyalty,” “love and faithfulness,” “unfailing love,” “faithful love,” “steadfast love,” and “loyal love,” depending on the Bible version. The core idea of this term communicates loyalty or faithfulness within a relationship.

*Lamentations 3:22-24 - The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. <sup>24</sup> “The LORD is my portion,” says my soul, “therefore I will hope in him.”*

The world is often unkind to you, as the cupbearer was to Joseph. But Jesus went to the cross because of His *hesed* for you. His loyalty to His people, His kindness and mercy toward us, was so unshakable that He endured the very worst that we could devise for Him so that we could be clothed in his perfect *hesed* and be credited with it as if we have lived out his perfect life of *hesed* ourselves.

IE., You may not love Jesus as you should, but he loves you as only he can.

### **Fourth: The Baker’s Dream 16-19**

- a) The baker’s dream 16-17
- b) Joseph’s interpretation 18-19

Whatever crime these men were guilty of, Joseph’s interpretation demonstrates that the cupbearer was innocent, but the baker was guilty.

### **Fifth: Dreams Fulfilled 20-22**

a) The cupbearer restored 20-21

“On the third day...” – This would be another theme to trace through the Bible

- The earth was separated from the waters on the 3rd day.
- There are 3 Patriarchs: Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob/Israel.
- The 3 verses of the Priestly Blessing in which the Tetragrammaton, YHWH, God's holy covenant name, appears 3 times (Numbers 6:24-26).
- 3 times the Seraphim cry "Holy, Holy, Holy" (Isaiah 6:3 and Revelation 4:8).
- After the Great Flood mankind descended from the 3 sons of Noah: Shem, Ham, and Japheth.
- 3 "men" announced to Abraham that his barren wife would bear a son (Genesis 18:14).
- Abraham was commanded to sacrifice his son after a 3-day journey to Mt. Moriah (Genesis 22:1-4).
- Baby Moses was hidden by his mother for 3 months (Exodus 2:1), and the adult Moses requests of Pharaoh that he let Moses take his people on a 3 day journey into the wilderness to offer sacrifice to their God (Exodus 3:18).
- There were 3 divisions of the Tabernacle and later the Temple in Jerusalem: the Outer Court, the Holy Place, and the Holy of Holies (Exodus 27:9; 26:1-30, 35-37; 31-34; 38:9-20; 21-31; 40:1-33; 1 Kings 6:1-37).
- The Theophany at Sinai was on the 3rd day after the people arrived.
- God is mentioned 3 times in the Shema (the first profession of faith in Deuteronomy 6:4) and 3 times in the blessing in Numbers 23:24.
- There are 3 attributes of God mentioned in Exodus 33:18-19: hen, rachum, and hesed (gracious, compassionate /merciful, and loving kindness).
- Of the 7 Holy Feasts of the Sinai Covenant, 3 are pilgrim feasts in which every man 13 years or older must present himself before God at the Temple in Jerusalem (Exodus 23:14-17; 34:18-23; Deuteronomy 16:5-17; 2 Chronicles 8:13).
- Jonah spent 3 days in the belly of the great fish (Jonah 1:17);
- Jonah took a 3-day journey across the city of Nineveh (Jonah 3:3)

Comparison: In this case, an innocent prisoner (Joseph and Jesus) was proven to be no simple dreamer after three days.

Comparison: Jesus was crucified between two thieves. On one of them, he pronounced a blessing, but the other suffered judgment.

Contrast: Joseph's interpretation/words rescued only the innocent prison, not the guilty one. The good news is that God rescues guilty sinners.

*My sin, O the bliss of this glorious thought,  
My sin, not in part, but the whole,  
Is nailed to the cross and I bear it no more.  
Praise the Lord. Praise the Lord, O my soul.*

b) The baker hanged 22

### **Sixth: Forgotten but not Forsaken 23**

This is so important.

V 14 'Only remember me' vs 23 'the cupbearer did not remember Joseph'

It will be another two years before a situation inspires the cupbearer to mention Joseph and his remarkable ability (Genesis 41:1, 9–14).

It is not the first time someone has tried to forget Joseph but, as we know, God has made him unforgettable.

### **Seventh: Application**

- 1 – The world often misreads your value but the cross proves it.
- 2 – The world may be unkind, but God's kindness is always for you.
- 3 – The world may forget you, but God knows where you are.
- 4 – Time is on your side. For example,

- Eve thought she had the promised Messiah in Abel but she did not
- Abraham and Sarah had to wait 25 years for Isaac.
- Joseph has to wait two years to be exonerated.
- The story of the Bible is our eternal God out-waiting time.

'All's well that ends well.' (Shakespeare)  
If it is not well, it is not the end.

## Community Groups

- 1 – Read the text
- 2 – What verses point to Joseph fulfilling Adam's Garden mandate?
- 3 – Read Gen 39:2 & 21-23. Why is it important that Moses remind us that God was with Joseph?
- 4 – How does knowing that God is with you change your circumstances even though your circumstances don't change?
- 5 – What do a cupbearer and baker do for Pharaoh, and why are their jobs important?
- 6 – Knowing this, why might they have been in prison? Why might Pharaoh have hanged the baker but restored the cupbearer?
- 7 – Why does the prison warden put Joseph in charge of these two men?
- 8 – Read 2 Timothy 3:13-17. How is the Bible a surer word than dreams?
- 9 – How did Joseph interpret the cupbearer's dream?
- 10 – How did Joseph interpret the baker's dream?
- 11 – Under what circumstances did their dreams come true?
- 12 – How is Joseph in prison with these two men like Jesus?
- 13 – How is Joseph's interpretation of their dreams like Jesus and the two thieves between whom he was crucified?
- 14 – How is Joseph's interpretation of their dreams unlike Jesus and the two thieves?
- 15 – What applications can you draw from this part of Joseph's story?
- 16 – How do you see Jesus in this story?

## Daily Devotions

**Monday, the 20<sup>th</sup>** – Read Gen 39:2; Gen 39:21-23 & Mt 28:19-20. How did Joseph's circumstances change in this chapter? What truth do you glean from these two verses? How does this knowledge create Joseph's mindset at Potiphar's house and the prison? Where are you now: at home, a far country, a prison? What does Mt 28 promise you? Think on that truth this morning, in the afternoon, and evening, when you are alone, in a group, at home, at work, etc. Every waking moment, 'the Lord is with you.'

**Tuesday, the 21<sup>st</sup>** – Read Gen 40:8, Is 46:10, & Ro 8:29. Joseph interpreted the baker and cupbearer's dreams, but it was God who gave Joseph the interpretations because only God knows the future and makes it come to pass. According to each of these verses, who knows and controls your future? Is he a trustworthy God in Joseph's life? Your life? When you are under duress, remember that only God knows and controls your future. Think about memorizing one of these verses to meditate on during difficult times.

**Wednesday, the 22<sup>nd</sup>** – Read 2 Tim 3:3-17. The certainty of God’s word in the midst of deception is the context for these verses. What does Paul tell Timothy to do with the Bible? What does “All Scripture is breathed by God” mean? In these verses, the Bible is good to tell us what is right (teaching), what is wrong (reproof), how to make wrong right (correction) and how to keep right, right (training in righteousness). If you lost your Bible today, how many verses could you recite to instruct your life? Perhaps today is a good day to begin a Bible memorization plan. Get a free copy of a book to help you memorize here at [navigators.org](http://navigators.org).

**Thursday, the 23<sup>rd</sup>** – Read Gen 2:15, 39:5 & 40:23. Think about Adam and Joseph. How did Adam fail in the Garden? How did Joseph succeed in Potiphar’s house and the prison? What does this tell you about what God commands? Who had the better environment to obey? What does this tell you about obedience and circumstances? What does it say about blaming our environment or others for disobedience? Does your life presently mirror Adam or Joseph? What do you need to change to obey God’s command to ‘work and keep’ your home or job? Make a list and begin those changes today.

**Friday, the 24<sup>th</sup>** – Gen 40:23 & 41:1a – How long does Joseph remain in prison after interpreting dreams? List all of the people from Gen 39 onward who have tried to or have forgotten Joseph. Who remembers Joseph? What practical application can you take from Joseph in a pit and in a prison? Reflect on the sermon’s applications. What application fits your life situation best? How can the Joseph story remind you of your value, God’s kindness, God’s knowledge of you, and your circumstance? Bring those thoughts to bear on your present situation.