

Genesis (2011) 40

- By his obedience and godliness, Joseph finds his situation changing from bad to worse
 - The Lord is testing Joseph by leading him through a series of circumstances
 - In each case, Joseph does the right thing
 - But the sinful world heaps more misery upon him
 - Joseph is persecuted for his righteousness
 - But we know the Lord is at work in these outcomes
 - He is allowing the troubles to pile up so He can create an opportunity for Joseph to develop his testimony
 - A testimony before the world, represented by Egypt
 - And a testimony before the family of Israel
 - These things are happening to Joseph because he has been appointed as the birthright holder within the sons of Jacob
 - His earlier dreams told us that Joseph was appointed to become the patriarch in the family
 - And he would receive a double portion of the inheritance
 - While Judah would receive the seed promise to bring forth the Messiah
 - We've already seen how unrighteous Judah was rescued by the Lord's hand from corrupting the seed line
 - Judah's story reveals that the salvation promise comes through men but is made possible by the grace and power of God
 - For certainly, Judah added nothing of value to the process
 - But the story of Joseph tells the opposite story

- As a picture of Christ, Joseph's story teaches us that God will bring a salvation to the world and to Israel through the life of one man
 - This man will be righteous and obedient
 - He will suffer for his righteousness yet will pass every test the world and enemy throws at him
 - And in the end, by his obedience, he will be elevated to a position of power and authority over the world and over Israel
- This is the story of Joseph and of Jesus Christ
 - One pictures the Other, and in that picture we come to understand the reason Joseph is called to suffer in these ways
 - Joseph has been appointed to bring this picture to us through his life, but what a challenge this must have been for the man Joseph
- Today we cover the final verses of chapter 39 and then move into chapter 40
 - Joseph has been accused of rape and imprisoned by Potiphar
 - He enjoyed great success as a slave, but now he's starting over
 - And he's moved into an even more challenging set of circumstances

[Gen. 39:21](#) But the LORD was with Joseph and extended kindness to him, and gave him favor in the sight of the chief jailer.

[Gen. 39:22](#) The chief jailer committed to Joseph's charge all the prisoners who were in the jail; so that whatever was done there, he was responsible for it.

[Gen. 39:23](#) The chief jailer did not supervise anything under Joseph's charge because the LORD was with him; and whatever he did, the LORD made to prosper.

- Even as we see Joseph's situation deteriorating, we hear that the Lord continues to extend His grace to Joseph
 - Once again, take note of the way scripture melds Joseph's negative circumstances with a testimony of God's favor and kindness
 - These two things are not in conflict

- The measure of God's goodness or kindness is not whether our life is carefree or easy or without suffering
- Joseph's descent into prison didn't mean God was displeased with him
 - It didn't mean Joseph had done anything wrong
 - It wasn't unfair
- On the contrary, the Lord was with Joseph, was extending kindness to him and giving him favor
 - The word for favor in Hebrew is *chen*, which simply means grace
 - Joseph received grace from God
 - But that grace came in the context of prison, not freedom
- Given the option of a trial-free life without God's grace or a trial-filled life accompanied by God's grace, we should always seek for the latter
- In this case, God's grace came in the form of a jailer who took notice of Joseph's superior leadership qualities
 - Like happened in Potiphar's house, the jailer places Joseph in charge over all the other prisoners
 - Clearly, a pattern has emerged in Joseph's life
 - Everywhere he goes, he quickly establishes himself as the authority figure over others
 - He ruled over his brothers
 - He ruled over the slaves
 - Now he rules over the prisoners
 - This is an outcome of God's grace in his life
 - The has determined that Joseph will be the one to lead people
 - No matter where Joseph lands, this outcome repeats itself
- At this point in the story, a fascinating parallel to Jesus' life begins to emerge, in keeping with Joseph as a picture of Christ

- Joseph's time in prison is the low point in his life
 - It represents the point where he is tested to the greatest extent
 - It also represents the end of his testing
 - From this point forward, Joseph begins to increase in stature and power
- If we draw a parallel to Jesus' life and ministry, then we could draw a parallel to the time He hung on the cross and descended into Hell for a time
 - That point represented the low point in Jesus' life
 - It was the greatest test and trial
 - And it made possible Christ's exaltation set the stage for reigning as King
- So as we move forward in this chapter, we'll look for more evidence of those parallels between Joseph's time in the prison and Jesus' time on the cross and in the grave

[Gen. 40:1](#) Then it came about after these things, the cupbearer and the baker for the king of Egypt offended their lord, the king of Egypt.

[Gen. 40:2](#) Pharaoh was furious with his two officials, the chief cupbearer and the chief baker.

[Gen. 40:3](#) So he put them in confinement in the house of the captain of the bodyguard, in the jail, the same place where Joseph was imprisoned.

[Gen. 40:4](#) The captain of the bodyguard put Joseph in charge of them, and he took care of them; and they were in confinement for some time.

- Joseph gets some company in prison
 - The cupbearer and baker of the Pharaoh are thrown in prison for what we will soon see is a capital offense
 - These officials of the court shared the same feature of Potiphar – they were eunuchs
 - The same word for “official” is used here as was used to describe Potiphar
 - What did these gentlemen do to anger the Pharaoh?

- Scripture doesn't say
- But we can make an educated guess
- A cup bearer and baker were positions that served Pharaoh directly
 - A cup bearer wasn't merely responsible for holding a cup
 - He acted like a Secret Service bodyguard to Pharaoh
 - He was responsible for ensuring that Pharaoh's entire food chain was kept safe
 - He would oversee the food bought in the market
 - He would inspect all food brought into the Pharaoh's kitchen
 - And to ensure the food was safe, the cupbearer would sample all the food before the Pharaoh ate of it
 - This way the cupbearer had a strong incentive to ensure it was poison-free
 - He got his title from his role of sampling the drink before giving the cup to Pharaoh
- The baker had a subordinate role, preparing the meal in the kitchen
 - He shared responsibility for ensuring the food was safe
 - So between these two men, the Pharaoh's protection from his enemies was their highest duty
- Since they were each responsible for the Pharaoh's bread and drink, perhaps Pharaoh had reason to suspect one of them was trying to poison him
 - Remember, that the Pharaoh was not an Egyptian (he was a Hyksos)
 - He must have feared regularly for his safety
 - Since there was apparently some doubt about which one of the men was guilty, they were both placed in the prison with Joseph
 - They were awaiting the Pharaoh's decision for who to hold responsible
 - The jail the three of them are in is attached to the captain of the guard's house

- That's Potiphar's house – he had a jail attached to his home
 - As court officials, they would have received special handling
 - The fact that the court officials were sent to this prison while awaiting judgment says this was not an ordinary prison
 - Joseph was sent to the same prison, a jail in the best of circumstances
 - So God continues to protect Joseph even though He is sending Joseph through these trials
- We're told in v.4 that Joseph spent "some" time in this prison
 - The Hebrew word for "some" is the word yom, which literally means a day
 - But in this cases, the word is used in a secondary meaning of an age
 - As in an extended period of time
 - We learn later that Joseph will leave prison and be elevated by Pharaoh when Joseph reaches the age of thirty
 - Remember, Joseph went into Egypt at seventeen
 - So Joseph was in Potiphar's house and that jail for a combined total of 13 years
 - And based on the opening verses of 41, Joseph must have been in the jail for at least 2 years and probably several more
 - We've already understood that bad things happen to good people when God chooses to work in us through trials
 - But are you prepared to accept how long a trial may be required in God's plan to test us?
 - Remember, Noah was called to suffer 100 years during the years he devoted to build the ark in keeping with the Lord command
 - To say nothing of the 14 months he spent living inside the ark?
 - Talk about a prison!

- And do you think Daniel suffered during Israel's 70 years of captivity?
 - To say nothing about his experience in the lion's den?
- And what about Joseph?
 - His circumstances required he spend 13 years suffering
 - We read about it in just a chapter or two of Genesis, but it took more than a decade for Joseph to rise above his trials
 - That's almost as long as we've been studying Genesis
- So why must Joseph suffer for so long?
 - The writer of Psalms tells us

[Psa. 105:17](#) He sent a man before them,
Joseph, who was sold as a slave.

[Psa. 105:18](#) They afflicted his feet with fetters,
He himself was laid in irons;

[Psa. 105:19](#) Until the time that his word came to pass,
The word of the LORD tested him.

[Psa. 105:20](#) The king sent and released him,
The ruler of peoples, and set him free.

[Psa. 105:21](#) He made him lord of his house
And ruler over all his possessions,

[Psa. 105:22](#) To imprison his princes at will,
That he might teach his elders wisdom.

- Joseph is being prepared to teach his elders wisdom
 - That preparation involves 13 years of learning the ways of Egypt
 - Consider that when Joseph arrived in Egypt, he didn't know the language
 - He didn't know the customs
 - He didn't understand Egyptian laws or traditions
 - But the psalmist says Joseph was appointed to become a lord over the house of Pharaoh

- To demonstrate wisdom, to execute God's purpose in Egypt
- Ultimately, he comes to picture Jesus in all these things
- But if Joseph is going to fulfill this purpose, he must spend time learning Egypt inside and out
 - So the Lord puts Joseph in the house of a servant of Pharaoh
 - In that place, Joseph learns the language and etiquette of royal society in Egypt
 - He learns the names and functions of court officials
 - He becomes familiar with law and customs in Egypt
 - Then he goes to prison, but not just any prison, but the king's prison
 - And here Joseph comes into contact with more court officials
 - And through one of these court officials, Joseph begins to make inroads to reach the most powerful man in the world - Pharaoh himself

[Gen. 40:5](#) 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.

[Gen. 40:6](#) When Joseph came to them in the morning and observed them, behold, they were dejected.

[Gen. 40:7](#) He asked Pharaoh's officials who were with him in confinement in his master's house, "Why are your faces so sad today?"

[Gen. 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."

- After some time together in the prison, Joseph notices both men looking particularly sad
 - Only someone like Joseph could look upon two men sent to prison and ask why are you so dejected
 - But Joseph evidently knew these two men well enough by now to sense something was different

- They had both experienced dreams, dreams that troubled them greatly
- But since they were in prison and had no access to the Pharaoh's official dream interpreters, they were without a way to understand the dreams' meanings
 - Egypt like Babylon employed sorcerers who used the black arts to divine spiritual knowledge
 - We see similar men working (or trying to work) in the book of Daniel
 - And also serving Pharaoh in the story of the Exodus
- But these men felt helpless because there are no interpreters nearby
 - Or so they think
- Joseph tells them that interpretations of spiritual messages comes from the Lord, so it does not depend on certain men
 - It simply requires the Lord to grant the proper spiritual equipping, and any man can serve Him in interpreting
 - This truth is so powerful, and it remains every bit true today
 - Spiritual truth and godly counsel aren't the privilege of a few men
 - On the contrary, these things are God-given, and all God's children have access to the same spirit
 - So we don't depend on a man to hear from God or to serve Him
 - On the other hand, scripture also tells us that God equips His children in different ways with different spiritual gifts to serve the needs of the body
 - So if the Lord appoints certain gifts to certain people with the Church, we do well to take full advantage of these giftings wherever we find them
 - Let gifted teachers, teach; gifted prayer warriors, pray; gifted healers, heal; gifted hearts of service, serve

- In Joseph's case, he was gifted to lead and to interpret dreams
 - In all the Bible, only Joseph and Daniel were gifted in this way, and both share some interesting similarities
 - Both interpreted while captive in a foreign land
 - Both serviced foreign monarchs who worshipped pagan gods
 - Both interpreted dreams given by God that no one else could interpret
 - Both speak in bold ways, sharing the interpretation without fear
 - Both were elevated into positions of authority by their interpretations
 - Clearly the Lord is working in these dreams to bring Joseph to a new and better place

[Gen. 40:9](#) So the chief cupbearer told his dream to Joseph, and said to him, "In my dream, behold, there was a vine in front of me;
[Gen. 40:10](#) and on the vine were three branches. And as it was budding, its blossoms came out, and its clusters produced ripe grapes.
[Gen. 40:11](#) "Now 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."
[Gen. 40:12](#) Then Joseph said to him, "This is the interpretation of it: the three branches are three days;
[Gen. 40:13](#) within 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.
[Gen. 40:14](#) "Only 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.
[Gen. 40:15](#) "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."

- Each man relates his dream to Joseph
 - The cupbearer's dream concerned a vine with three branches
 - As the grapes ripened, the cupbearer took the grapes and squeezed juice into the Pharaoh's cup
 - And placed the cup in Pharaoh's hand

- Joseph tells the interpretation of the dream
 - The three branches reflect three days more of suffering in jail
 - But at that point, the cupbearer will be restored
- At this point, Joseph sees an opportunity to help himself
 - Knowing a positive result is assured for the cupbearer, Joseph realizes that this man will soon be in the Pharaoh's presence again
 - Once he reaches that position, he will be able to influence Pharaoh concerning Joseph's situation
 - Certainly, the king would have use for a man like Joseph who can interpret dreams
 - So Joseph's asks for his help
- Notice how Joseph describes himself
 - He was from the land of the Hebrews
 - That's a statement of faith and political savvy on Joseph's part
 - In this day, the land where Jacob lived was not the land of the Hebrews
 - It was the land of the Canaanites
 - But Joseph knew it had been given to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob by God by way of a promise
 - So even now he's referring to Canaan as the land of Hebrews
 - But Joseph has also learned that the Pharaoh is a Hyksos king, not a Hamite ruler
 - And Hyksos were also Semites, like the Hebrews
 - So by mentioned his origins, Joseph hopes to persuade the Pharaoh to take an interest in his case
- Here we have the complimentary lesson to our earlier focus on learning to accept trials and sufferings as part of serving the Lord

- Joseph may have understood that God was working in his circumstances and so he remained obedient in the meantime
 - But that doesn't mean Joseph had to be passive in his circumstances
 - Obedience during a trial doesn't require we abandon all hope for a rescue
 - And it certainly doesn't mean we can work in appropriate ways to improve our circumstances
- Joseph used his God-given talents and abilities to improve his situation everywhere he went
 - In Potiphar's house, he worked hard and showed trustworthiness
 - And the result was a better situation as a slave
 - In prison, he did the same, and gain the benefit again
 - Now he has a chance to win his freedom or so he hopes
 - So he makes the most of it
 - But he does it by relying on the gifts God has given him
 - And he gives all credit to the Lord in the process
 - And then he waits to see what the Lord will do with his hopes and his service
- Don't forget Joseph's example in the midst of your personal trials of faith and endurance
 - Know God is working in your circumstances
 - Trust that the Lord has a good purpose in your circumstance
 - Continue to obey and serve diligently without discouragement
 - And use every God-given talent and gift and brain cell to find your way out of your circumstances
 - And pray for Him to make the most of your efforts