

Free Bible study Genesis 40 - 43

Introduction: Joseph has been thrown in prison because of the lies of Potiphar's wife. Yet Joseph does not become bitter against God or doubt God's goodness. Joseph continues to serve God and to do right while in prison, and again God blesses Joseph. In all of this the plan of God is being played out. At the right time Joseph is called to interpret King Pharaoh's dreams and is appointed second ruler in Egypt. In one of the great ironies of the Old Testament, the brothers of Joseph come to him, the brother whom they had sold, and depend on his mercy to get food for their families. They don't know it is Joseph.

Notes on Genesis 40-43

40:1 - cupbearer - Responsible for the quality of the king's wine and for tasting it to be sure it was not poisoned.

40:4 - assigned them to Joseph - An indication of how highly trusted and responsible Joseph had become in the prison.

40:5 - had a dream - Dreams were sometimes used by God to reveal things to people or to foretell the future.

40:7 - Why are your faces so sad? - Joseph went beyond business to personal concern for people. Joseph's kind, unselfish disposition made him sensitive to the struggles and problems of others.

40:8 - Do not interpretations belong to God? Compare Daniel 2:27, 28. Joseph and Daniel did not take credit for themselves but gave all the credit and glory to God whose power made interpretation possible.

40:13 - lift up your head - You are bowed in shame and are under condemnation, but Pharaoh will forgive you so that you can hold your head up again.

40:19 - lift off your head [NASB: lift up your head] - a reference to beheading or hanging. This is a word play on what Joseph had said earlier to the cupbearer.

40:23 - forgot him - People are full of their own concerns and often forget the troubles of others. We may wonder how God could allow Joseph to lie in prison for two more years. But timing can be important in God's plan. Learning to trustingly wait on God is an important part of our training as disciples.

After Moses tried to rescue Israel, God let him herd sheep for 40 years in the desert before he called him back to work as deliverer. Jesus was thirty years old before he started his public ministry. The Jews would not accept anyone in religious leadership at a younger age than that. During his time in prison Joseph learned things about trusting God, leadership and responsibility--things that would help him when God raised him to higher work later.

Students at the Institute sometimes get impatient to be out in full ministry, but time spent in preparation makes the later ministry far more productive than it would have been.

41:1 - Pharaoh had a dream and was troubled because he felt God was telling him something.

41:8 - magicians and wise men - Kings in those days kept a group of such advisors who were supposed to know more about the supernatural.

41:9 - my shortcomings - My mistakes that caused me to be thrown in prison, where I met a man who can interpret dreams.

41:13 - turned out exactly as he interpreted them - One of the evidences of a true prophet - compare Deuteronomy 18:22.

41:14 - shaved and changed his clothes - If we honor an official by looking our best, how much more it is appropriate to honor God by being clean and properly dressed when we go to worship. It is a way of showing respect. At the same time, we should never look down on a visitor who is not "properly" dressed or groomed at church, or make the person feel less accepted. We need to accept people where they are and know that as they grow spiritually, they will make better choices. Our over-dressing at church may even make some people feel that they don't belong because they can't dress as we do. We have to pray for wisdom so that we can avoid both disrespecting God and putting up unnecessary barriers to newcomers.

41:16 - I cannot do it...God will give...the answer - Again Joseph in his humility does not falsely credit himself but glorifies God.

41:28 - God has shown Pharaoh what he is about to do - How merciful it was of God to warn Pharaoh about the coming famine so that Pharaoh could store food for his own nation and thousands of other people who would otherwise have died. This case also shows that God had mercy for Gentiles and not just Israelites.

41:33 - let Pharaoh look for a discerning and wise man - The training Joseph had gone through in slavery and prison made him competent, confident and wise enough to advise a king.

41:38 - Can we find anyone like this man...? - People who mature in God's wisdom and manage their lives well will always get ahead and make a good impression.

41:40 - Only with respect to the throne - Joseph would be second to Pharaoh in all of Egypt. There is a spiritual truth which is as certain as the law of gravity: "Whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted" - Matthew 23:12. We don't have to worry about getting to "be somebody." All we need to do is concentrate on serving well at what we do and God will take care of the rest. The fallen, natural person exalts himself/herself, tries to get ahead of others. Pride and selfishness are the main curses since the fall.

41:46 - thirty years old - It had taken Joseph 13 years to come through his trials. He came through by doing right even though he could not see the outcome at the time.

41:48 - Joseph collected - What he learned in Potiphar's house and in prison prepared him for the great thing God had in store for him.

41:50 - two sons - From these would come two half-tribes in Israel.

41:51 - Manasseh - derived from the Hebrew word meaning "forget" - NIV text note.

41:52 - Ephraim - suggested by the Hebrew word meaning "twice fruitful" - NIV text note.

41:54 - there was food - Prudent forethought for the future makes the difference.

41:56 - whole country [NASB: in all the land]. Canaan, where Jacob and Joseph's brothers lived, was also affected as we see below.

42:2 - Go...and buy - Jacob's family did not have crops, but they did have wealth and were able to buy food if it could be found.

42:4 - did not send Benjamin - Benjamin had been born to Jacob's favorite wife, Rachel, and, especially

after the loss of Joseph, was Jacob's dearest possession.

42:6 - bowed down to him - Exactly as Joseph had dreamed 20 or more years before - Genesis 37:5-11.

42:7 - pretended to be a stranger - Joseph's appearance would have changed since he was now a mature man and would have been wearing Egyptian clothing and hairstyle. Before revealing himself, Joseph wanted time to test his brothers and see if their evil hearts had changed.

42:15 - tested - Joseph would pretend to check out their story.

42:15 - youngest brother - If you are telling the truth about having a younger brother, prove it by bringing him here.

42:17 - three days - Softening them up by letting them worry and think about what was happening to them.

42:18 - I fear God - Hearing this must have comforted the brothers. It is always heartening to meet among all the unbelievers someone who fears God.

42:21 - we would not listen - Through what they are now suffering, they are brought face to face with their sin. This was hard but was necessary for their healing and salvation.

42:22 - Didn't I tell you - As usual when something bad happens, people start trying to lay blame.

42:23 - did not realize that Joseph could understand them - and so were revealing everything to Joseph.

42:24 - began to weep - Whatever these men had done to Joseph, they were still his family. Maybe he was weeping from the pain he still remembered. More likely Joseph was touched by hearing his hard-hearted brothers confess their sin.

had Simeon...bound - Joseph was not finished testing these men. The test must be real.

42:28 - hearts sank - They were already in trouble with the official and now in some way they had failed to pay for the grain they took.

42:38 - My son will not go down there - Jacob could not yet face that.

43:8 - so that we...may live - We have no choice but to take Benjamin with us. Otherwise we will all die of hunger.

43:9 - I...will guarantee his safety - There may be an improvement in Judah's spirit.

43:11 - gift - Jacob will try to soften the official's heart as he once softened Esau's heart.

43:18 - frightened - They had no clue that Joseph was their brother and wanted a meal with them.

43:19 - spoke to him at the entrance - They wanted to fix the matter of the money before anything else happened.

43:26 - bowed down - Joseph's dreams are again fulfilled.

43:29 - God be gracious to you - Joseph could not help but bless his brother.

43:32 - Egyptians could not eat with Hebrews - In this fallen world racial hatred and division are nothing new. Only the love of Christ can bridge these man-made gulfs.

43:33 - seated...in the order of their ages - The brothers were mystified. How could anyone know to do this?

43:34 - feasted - Our lesson division stops here and leaves us in suspense.

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