

GENESIS 41

Please turn in your Bibles this evening to Genesis chapter 41 as we continue our study through the Word of God.

Over the last few weeks and really through the rest of the book of Genesis we will be looking at a man named Joseph. He was a son of Jacob, and he was a favorite son of Jacob.

Jacob gave Joseph a coat of many colors or a long-sleeved robe and it would seem that he was in charge of his brothers, he was to keep an eye on them even though he was the youngest of his ten other brothers. I don't think Jacob, their father, trusted them but he did trust Joseph.

And we saw that Joseph had two dreams that showed that his brothers would bow down to him and not just his brothers but his mother and father as well.

To say that they did not appreciate this dream is putting it mildly. Because they were so angry at Joseph, they conspired to do away with this dreamer of dreams. And when the time came, they sold him into the hands of Midianite slave traders who then sold Joseph to Potiphar, the captain of Pharaoh's guard down in Egypt.

And things were going well for Joseph, even though he was a slave. He was over all of Potiphar's house and through Joseph, Potiphar was blessed, and Potiphar knew it.

We then saw that Potiphar's wife tried to get Joseph to sleep with her, and it was not just a one-time request. She kept at it until he finally ran out of the house.

I think Potiphar's wife usually got what she wanted and now she didn't, and she was mad. So mad that she accused Joseph of raping her.

When Potiphar heard what had taken place, I don't believe that he trusted his wife with her story. He knew his wife and I think this was not the first time she engaged in this kind of activity. And he knew Joseph and he had a hard time believing that he would do something like this.

The reason I say that is because Potiphar didn't put Joseph to death, but he put him in prison because he had to do something, he could not just ignore what Joseph was accused of.

And we saw this story in our last study as Joseph was in prison, falsely accused of attempting to rape his master's wife.

In prison God brought to him two servants of Pharaoh, the butler and the baker.

You see, Pharaoh uncovered an assassination attempt on his life, he was going to be poisoned, but he was not sure which servant was going to carry out this plot, so he put them both in prison until he could figure it out.

In prison these two men have dreams and Joseph gives them the interpretation of their dreams. And you can see the heart of Joseph as he does not take credit for this, he gives glory to God for revealing them to him.

For the butler, in three days he would be restored before Pharaoh and for the baker, in three days he would be put to death for his plan to kill Pharaoh!

And Joseph asked the butler to remember him when he is released, to remember him before Pharaoh and tell Pharaoh that he did not belong in prison, he did nothing wrong.

And just as Joseph said would happen, it came to pass. The butler was restored, and the baker was put to death and as chapter 40 closed, we read; **“Yet the chief butler did not remember Joseph, but forgot him.”** Genesis 40:23.

I hope you are seeing that the hand of God is all over this story. God is working and yet, how in the world could this butler forget what Joseph had done for him?

It does not seem fair unless you read the rest of the story and see once again the hand of God, the timing of God being perfect.

I think we miss out on that many times because we don't get what we want, things don't happen like we think they should.

Please understand it is the timing and plan of God and don't get in His way. You see, His way is perfect, it is what is best for us. We need to learn to wait upon the Lord and let Him work in His time!

That is where we will pick up our study this evening here in Genesis chapter 41 starting in verse 1, with Joseph still in prison and two full years have passed by. Let's see what the Lord has for us as we study His Word this evening.

GENESIS 41

VERSE 1a

I have spoken about this but from a purely human perspective, doesn't that seem unfair?

Think about it. Joseph is doing God's will, serving the Lord faithfully and once again things go bad.

The royal butler forgot about Joseph for two full years!

As I have said, as unfair as that might seem, it was God's perfect timing to fulfill His perfect plan.

If the butler spoke up about Joseph to Pharaoh any earlier, things would not have worked out.

Thus, don't rush God and just because a situation doesn't work the way you want it to, walk by faith and trust in the Lord as Joseph did.

In Psalm 18:30 we are told, "**As for God, His way is perfect; The word of the Lord is proven; He is a shield to all who trust in Him.**"

Now let me be honest with you. I don't always see the way or the timing of God as being perfect, especially and usually when I am going through a difficult time.

The problem is that I don't see the end result, I just see the present mess that I am in.

But that is where trust, faith come in. You see, the only reason I am questioning the timing of God is because of the difficult situation that I am in, and I want out.

What we need to do is rest in the fact that God knows exactly what we are going through, He has a plan, He has a purpose, and we need to understand that.

In Psalm 34:19 we are told, "**Many are the afflictions of the righteous, But the Lord delivers him out of them all.**"

Or, as Paul put it in Romans 8:28, "**And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose.**"

God's plans for our lives are not to hurt us but to help us and again, it is easy to believe when things are going well, but we also need to believe that when things are not going well, because it is still true!

For Joseph, we don't see him complain that the butler forgot about him, he just continued to serve in prison, do the best he could and in doing so he was honoring God. And this went on for two full years! What a lesson for us. No matter what, keep serving Him!

Think about this for a minute. Joseph has been in prison maybe some three years or more now, and thirteen years have come and gone since his brothers sold him into slavery. But the story is far from being over as we are going to see as we read on.

VERSES 1b-7

At this appointed time, Pharaoh has two dreams in one night.

In his first dream seven fat cows came out of the Nile River and grazed along the banks.

Then seven gaunt or skinny cows came up and ate the seven fat cows.

After Pharaoh woke up, he said, ***“I should not have had that peperoni pizza before I went to bed!”***

No, he did not say that. He ended up going back to sleep and he dreamed another dream.

This time seven thin heads of grain devoured seven plump heads of grain. And once again Pharaoh woke up. Now he was not going back to sleep!

And, at this point, I would be calling in the new baker and seeing what he put in the food that evening!

For Pharaoh, he knew that these were not normal dreams.

How do I know that?

Look at verse 8 and you will see what I mean.

VERSE 8

Pharaoh knew that these dreams were not the result of eating a bad pizza that night. They meant something and yet he did not know what they were telling him.

Thus, he calls for the magicians and the wise men. Keep in mind that these men were into the occult, and they could interpret dreams or people believed that they could. You see, they had dream books that would help them. But here, they had no idea what these two dreams meant!

Now while these magicians and wise men were called in and Pharaoh was telling them his dreams, the chief butler was there listening.

Keep in mind that part of the job of the chief butler was to get Pharaoh anything that he wanted.

As he was listening and hearing that none of them could help Pharaoh out in interpreting his dreams, the chief butler was now going to speak up.

Listen to what he says.

VERSES 9-13

Now some read a story like this, and they come to the conclusion, ***“How lucky is this, what a coincidence, now the butler remembers Joseph and how he correctly interpreted the baker and his dream two years earlier.”***

Please understand that this has nothing to do with luck. There is no such thing as a coincidence with God.

Make no mistake about it, this was the plan of God and in His timing; it is now coming to pass!

It is interesting to hear the unsaved speak as if they are in control.

We need to remember that God has a plan, and He will use man to fulfill His plan, even if they don't know Him or don't believe He is real. He knows what will happen and He will use it to bring about His plan.

In Proverbs 16:9 Solomon tells us, “**A man’s heart plans his way, But the Lord directs his steps.**”

And in Proverbs 19:21 he tells us, “**There are many plans in a man’s heart, Nevertheless the Lord’s counsel - that will stand.**”

You see, even the wicked, the ungodly will fulfill the plan of God!

I think that is something we need to remember as we live in this world, and the wickedness that seems to be growing. This will happen because God has warned us, and He will use it to bring about His judgment upon a Christ rejecting world as well as bringing forth the Kingdom Age. It is all according to His plan, His purposes and His timing!

And here is another point. No matter what you are going through, God is working, and He is aware, nothing escapes His eye.

Jesus reminds us of this in Matthew 10:29-31, “**Are not two sparrows sold for a copper coin? And not one of them falls to the ground apart from your Father’s will. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Do not fear therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows.**”

May we not forget that even when we are walking in those dark times, He is still working, He is still with us!

Let me add this before we move on. In Genesis 41:13 it seems like what the butler was telling Pharaoh was not only that Joseph interpreted their dreams, but he made them come to pass as well.

Now that sounds strange to us but understand what the Egyptians believed. They believed that the one who had power to interpret dreams was also the one who fulfilled those dreams or brought them to pass. He had the power to do this.

VERSE 14

Before Joseph could come before Pharaoh he had to get cleaned up and shaved. He was a prisoner and probably dirty, filthy and unshaved.

According to Wilkinson, *“the custom of shaving the head as well as beard was not confined to the priests in Egypt, but was general among all classes.”*

Thus, Joseph was cleaned, and new clothes were given to him so he could stand before the King!

Have you ever thought about what God was doing during those two full years that Joseph was in prison after he interpreted those dreams for the butler and the baker?

God was working in Joseph so that He could work through Joseph. He was building the character of God in Him.

Folks, God is doing the same in us, transforming us into the image of Christ. We look at times of our life as wasted time, but God is using them to help us to grow, He is preparing us for the work that is ahead!

Paul, in Philippians 3:17-21 tells us, **“Brethren, join in following my example, and note those who so walk, as you have us for a pattern. For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ: whose end is destruction, whose god is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame - who set their mind on earthly things. For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself.”**

God is working in us so that He can work through us and touch the lives of many for Him!

Now, as much as God is working in us, the Devil is also working to deceive us, and he is good.

Paul warns us in II Corinthians 11:13-15, **“For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ. And no wonder! For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also transform themselves into ministers of righteousness, whose end will be according to their works.”**

Yes, God is working in us, transforming us into the image of Christ but beware. Satan has his false prophets who are nothing more than wolves in sheep’s clothing trying to deceive the sheep and destroy them.

How do we know these false prophets?

Jesus tells us in Matthew 7:15-20, **“Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes from thornbushes or figs from thistles? Even so, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Therefore by their fruits you will know them.”**

What is born from their lives, what do they identify with will tell you if they are of God or not.

Is their fruit good and when I speak of good, I am speaking of it being based in the Word of God.

If it is not in the Word of God, then they are in error, and we are not to listen to them.

It is as we are told in Isaiah 8:19-20, **“And when they say to you, ‘Seek those who are mediums and wizards, who whisper and mutter,’ should not a people seek their God? Should they seek the dead on behalf of the living? To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, it is because there is no light in them.”**

May we be aware as we are warned!

VERSES 15-16

Think of it like this. Pharaoh’s dream was actually a revelation from God. He received it but could not understand it.

And Pharaoh is giving glory to Joseph, that he is the one that is going to give the interpretation of these dreams.

But Joseph will not accept that, and he points Pharaoh to the Lord. It is God who gives the interpretation!

Yes, Joseph could have taken the glory, Pharaoh was ready to give it to him, but Joseph gave glory to God for He alone can interpret dreams, as I have said.

You see, God was working in Joseph and now He is working through Joseph!

Pharaoh is now going to share his dreams with Joseph so that Joseph can interpret them for him.

VERSES 17-24

Here we see Pharaoh tell Joseph his dreams and he fills in some more details.

The seven fat cows came up out of the Nile River and were feeding on the richest fodder or food or hay by the river.

Then seven ugly, gaunt, emaciated cows came up and ate these fat cows and when they were done, they still looked emaciated!

I don't know how many of you saw the John Candy movie, *The Great Outdoors*, but it was a very funny movie.

In it he plays Chet Ripley, and he comes to a restaurant on vacation with his family and orders a 96-ounce steak.

You see, if you ate the whole thing, it was free!

As he takes that last bite of steak, barely able to chew it down, the 400-pound cook comes up to him and says, "*You have to finish the grizzle, too.*" You should have seen his face!

I bet he unbuckled his belt a few notches by the time he was done, but these cows, nothing. They did not change their outward appearance even though they devoured these plump cows!

Then Pharaoh goes on to tell Joseph his second dream, and it was similar to the first, just a different picture. You see, here were seven thin heads of grain that ate seven plump heads of grain.

And as troubled as Pharaoh was over this, no wise man, no magician, those who could interpret dreams, they could not tell Pharaoh what they meant.

The only one in the land that could was a Hebrew slave named Joseph who served the true and living God!

And now it is in the hands of Joseph to give the interpretation, but, as we will see, it is not Joseph, but God who will explain this dream He gave to Pharaoh.

VERSES 25-32

What God showed Pharaoh in his dreams was what He was about to do.

The seven plump cows and the seven plump heads of grain represented the same thing, seven bountiful years of harvest in the land.

The seven gaunt cows and the seven thin heads of grain represented the same thing, seven years of terrible famine in the land.

And I believe the reason Pharaoh saw this dream in two different ways was to show him that this was going to take place, it was not just a bad dream, this was a reality that was coming upon the land shortly.

In fact, that is what we read here in Genesis 41:32 as Joseph told Pharaoh, “**And the dream was repeated to Pharaoh twice because the thing is established by God, and God will shortly bring it to pass.**”

We also see this idea of two witnesses in Deuteronomy 19:15, “**One witness shall not rise against a man concerning any iniquity or any sin that he commits; by the mouth of two or three witnesses the matter shall be established.**”

That in a sense is what we see here, two witnesses in these two dreams!

Also, as you read this you get a sense of urgency. This is going to happen, and it is going to happen shortly.

The seven good years of harvest are coming soon, and they will be followed by seven years of severe famine in the land. They will be back to back.

I guess Joseph was released from prison just in time, in fact it was the perfect time, God’s perfect timing.

It is as Paul said, “**And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose.**” Romans 8:28.

Now, is there any evidence or documentation that there were seven bountiful years of harvest in the land that was followed by seven years of famine in the land? Is there a historical record of this?

You bet there is! In Grant Jeffrey’s book, *The Signature of God*, he tells us,

A fascinating inscription confirming the Bible’s account of the “*seven years of great plenty*” followed by the “*seven years of famine*” (Genesis 41:29, 30) was discovered during the nineteenth century in southern Saudi Arabia.

This inscription was found on a marble tablet in a ruined fortress on the seashore of Hadramaut in present-day Democratic Yemen.

An examination of the writing suggests that it was written approximately eighteen hundred years before the birth of Christ, a time that corresponds with the biblical narrative about Jacob and his twelve sons.

This inscription was rendered in Arabic by Professor Schltens and was later translated into English by Rev. Charles Forster.

This is his translation of this ancient inscription:

We dwelt at ease in this castle a long tract of time;
 nor had we a desire but for the region-lord of the vineyard.
 Hundreds of camels returned to us each day at evening,
 their eye pleasant to behold in their resting-places.
 And twice the number of our camels were our sheep,
 in comeliness like white doves, and also the slow-moving kine.
 We dwelt in this castle **seven years of good life**
 - how difficult for memory its description!
Then came years barren and burnt up:
when one evil year had passed away,
Then came another to succeed it.

And we became as though we had never seen a glimpse of good.
 They died and neither foot nor hoof remained.
 Thus fares it with him who renders not thanks to God:
 His footsteps fail not to be blotted out from his dwelling.

This ancient poem records the devastation of the years of famine and barrenness that followed the seven years of plenty. The language of the poem implies that the famine also lasted seven years.

This account from Ancient Arabia provides independent evidence confirming the accuracy of the biblical account of the seven years of plenty in the Middle East followed by seven years of famine that occurred during the rule of Joseph as prime minister of Egypt.

Moses recorded the history of the Egyptian famine and the wise preparations that Joseph made to gather up the surplus grain during the seven years of plenty to provide against the coming years of famine. *“So he gathered up all the food of the seven years which were in the land of Egypt, and laid up the food in the cities; he laid up in every city the food of the fields which surrounded them”* (Genesis 41:48).

Again, Moses recorded: *“Then the seven years of plenty which were in the land of Egypt ended, and the seven years of famine was in all lands, but in all the land of Egypt there was bread. . . . The famine was over all the face of the earth, and Joseph opened all the storehouses and sold to the Egyptians. And the famine became severe in the land of Egypt. So all countries came to Joseph in Egypt to buy grain, because the famine was severe in all lands”* (Genesis 41:53-57).

As the book of Genesis recorded, the seven-year famine was so severe in Egypt that Joseph, as the chief administrator, had to be very careful in selling food from the precious grain reserves to satisfy the hunger of all the inhabitants of the surrounding countries. Joseph could not sell the grain reserves of Egypt for gold and silver to everyone because of the danger that the grain would run out. When the famine was at its peak, grain was much more valuable than gold or money.

Explorers during the last century discovered a number of other fascinating ancient inscriptions in the Middle East that provided confirmation of facts recorded in the sacred Scriptures.

Ebn Hesham, an Arab from Yemen, showed the English explorer, Mr. Cruttenden, a rich tomb of a wealthy Yemenite woman who had died during the time of the Egyptian famine recorded in Genesis 41. This Yemenite tomb was fortunately discovered around 1850 after being exposed following a flood that uncovered the grave site.

The tomb contained the body of a rich noblewoman who was covered in beautiful jewels. Seven collars of pearls surrounded her neck; her hands and feet were covered with seven bracelets, armbands, rings, and ankle-rings displaying costly jewels. In addition, her tomb contained a coffer filled with rich treasure.

However, the greatest treasure of all was a fascinating engraved stone tablet bearing her final inscription which confirmed the biblical account of Joseph's careful management of the remaining food reserves during the seven years of famine in Egypt.

A Yemenite Inscription About a Famine During the Time of Joseph

In they name O God, the God of Hamyar,
 I Tajah, the daughter of Dzu Shefar, **sent my steward to Joseph,**
 And he delaying to return to me, I sent my hand maid
 With a measure of silver, to bring me back a measure of flour:
 And not being able to procure it, I sent her with a measure of gold:
 And not being able to procure it, I sent her with a measure of pearls:
 And not being able to procure it, I commanded them to be ground:
 And finding no profit in them, I am shut up here.
 Whosoever may hear of it, let him commiserate me;
 And should any woman adorn herself with an ornament
 From my ornaments, may she die with no other than my death.

(Reported in Niebuhr's Voyage en Arabie, PL. LIX.
 Translation by Rev. Charles Forster)

This ancient inscription reveals a Yemenite Arab noble woman's sincere complaint that she could not purchase Egypt's grain with her gold. It also reveals Joseph's determination to resist any appeal from a stranger offering gold in return for Egypt's precious grain reserves. This determination reminds us of Joseph's similar resolve earlier in his life when he resisted the attempt of Potiphar's wife to destroy his virtue.

The tragic history of famines often recorded the bartering of the most precious of metals and luxuries in trade for the smallest amount of food available.

- Grant Jeffrey, *The Signature of God*, pp. 42-45

So there is historical evidence of this event, this famine, which once again supports what the Bible says took place!

VERSES 33-36

What we have seen so far as Joseph interpreted the dream for Pharaoh is that Joseph gave to Pharaoh *knowledge*, or he told him what would happen according to the dreams that he had.

Knowledge is very important but apart from *wisdom*, that *knowledge* is meaningless.

Thus, what we see next is Joseph applies *wisdom* to that *knowledge* by showing Pharaoh what needs to be done with that information.

Again, it is simple. *Knowledge* tells you what is going on; *wisdom* tells you what to do about it. *Knowledge* is the diagnosis; *wisdom* is directed to the cure. *Knowledge* is good and necessary – it just isn't enough.

Think about our world today and all the knowledge that is out there, more than there is wisdom.

What do I mean by that?

What I mean is this. Look at scientists, doctors, politicians and the rest that can see all the problems that are out there, but they don't apply that knowledge correctly and thus, they don't come up with the answer.

What is the answer?

The answer is – ***JESUS!***

He is the solution to our problems.

Think about it like this. Scientists look at this planet, all the life that is on it and that is knowledge. What they do is they don't apply that knowledge correctly and their answer is that all this happened through the process of evolution. No life at all to all the life we see today happened over millions of years.

We see that differently. What do I mean?

I mean that the answer to the question of where life came from is – *JESUS!* He created the heavens and the earth and all the life we see and don't see!

That is the correct application to knowledge!

And look at what Joseph does with this information. You see, he not only tells Pharaoh what is coming, he also tells Pharaoh what needs to be done during this time, he has a plan. And that is wisdom!

There are many people out there who are good at complaining but don't know how to resolve the situation or they don't want to assist in resolving the situation.

Don't just complain about something, but you also need to come up with a plan to resolve that problem. For Joseph, this was an urgent call to action and Pharaoh needed to appoint someone to administrate this plan.

But who will that be?

We will find out shortly and I think you can already guess who it is going to be!

Some ancient sources suggest that Pharaoh normally took 10% of the grain in Egypt as a tax.

If this were true, then Joseph doubled taxes over the next seven years.

His plan was simple. There would be a 20% tax on the produce of the land during the seven bountiful years of harvest and the reason for this is simple. There were also coming seven years of famine, and this was to offset those bad years, to prepare for them by storing grain.

It is as Joseph said, **“Then that food shall be as a reserve for the land for the seven years of famine which shall be in the land of Egypt, that the land may not perish during the famine.”** Genesis 41:36.

And look at who Pharaoh will put in charge of overseeing these taxes. I think you know.

VERSES 37-44

Sometimes we read these stories and we don't think much about what took place. This is an amazing story. You might say he went from rags to riches, or from the pit to the pinnacle!

Keep in mind that he was sold into slavery. His owner's wife accused him of raping her and thus, Potiphar, the captain of the guard and the one who owned Joseph put him in prison.

He was in prison and now, he is second in charge over all of Egypt, just under Pharaoh! Can you imagine the conversation at the breakfast table between Potiphar and his wife. ***"Honey, you know that slave that you sad raped you. Well, he is now my boss!"***

Again, this did not happen overnight. Yes, Joseph was raised from the pit to the pinnacle, but it took some thirteen years for that to take place.

He is now thirty years old, and he was sold into slavery when he was seventeen years old! Yes, his life did change overnight, but there were thirteen years of God working in Joseph to get to this point!

Joseph only seemed to be an overnight success. In truth, his journey from the pit to the pinnacle, like I have said, took thirteen hard years.

Why do I keep bringing that up?

Because I think we get impatient with the Lord that things are not happening as fast as we think that they should. Remember, in His time He will make all things beautiful, not in our time!

As you look at this part of Joseph's story keep in mind that it gives us some important principles regarding promotion and advancement.

In Psalm 75:6-7 we are told, **"For exaltation comes neither from the east Nor from the west nor from the south. But God is the Judge: He puts down one, And exalts another."**

In other words, God is in control, and He will raise people up and He will bring them down, it is according to His will and not ours. That does not mean we sit back and do nothing. Look at the life of Joseph, all those years working as a slave and in prison he worked hard, and it is out of that we see God raise Joseph up!

Also, did you notice what this pagan King saw in Joseph?

We see this in Genesis 41:38, where we are told, “**. . . ‘Can we find such a one as this, a man in whom is the Spirit of God?’**”

He saw the Spirit of the living God working in and through Joseph!

When people look at your life, what do they see? Do they see the Spirit of the living God working in your life, manifested in the things that you are doing?

If not, maybe it is because you are not allowing the Spirit of God to work in you, you are not submitting to the Spirit’s leading in your life and if you will not allow the Spirit of God to work in you, He will not work through you!

Paul, in Ephesians 5:15-21 tells us, “**See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is. And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord, giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, submitting to one another in the fear of God.**”

Paul is saying that we need to be continually being filled with the Spirit of God. Yes, the days are evil out there, but greater is He that is in you than he that is in the world, so don’t use that as an excuse!

You see, as you are continually filled with the Spirit of God, as you submit to His will and not yours, you will have joy in your heart that will overflow with thanksgiving to God and a submission to others, you won't lord over people!

In other words, the fruit of the Spirit – *LOVE* – will flow from your life and be manifested in many different ways. As it is others will see that God is not only working in you, but through you!

VERSE 45

So we see Pharaoh call Joseph – Zaphnath-Paaneah. Interestingly enough, his name means **God speaks and he lives!**

It would seem that Pharaoh recognized that God spoke through Joseph and God not only preserved Joseph all these years, but He is going to preserve his people from perishing during this coming famine upon the land!

What a powerful witness Joseph was and my prayer for you and for me is that others would see that God speaks through us by His Spirit in accordance with His Word. Not only that but our God preserves our lives, He sees us through various situations of life that from a human perspective, we should not make it and yet He takes care of things for His glory and our witness of Him!

Pharaoh also gave Joseph a wife; her name was Asenath who was the daughter of the priest in On.

On was a city seven miles north of Cairo and it was the center of sun worship, the god Ra was the name of this god.

And, as we saw in a previous study, On was also called by its Greek name, Heliopolis.

VERSES 46-49

As we have seen, the usual Egyptian tax was 10% on grain but with the coming famine, Joseph raises it to 20% or one-fifth of their harvest was to be given back to Joseph to prepare for this coming famine.

You see, there needed to be enough grain stored away to last those seven years of famine to preserve the people!

VERSES 50-52

Joseph came to Egypt as a slave. He was placed in prison. And now look at how God blessed his life. And from his wife, and it would seem like his only wife, which was very unusual in that culture, Joseph has two sons.

Again, Joseph is a picture of Jesus and like Joseph, there is only one Bride for Christ, and that is the church! Very interesting.

What I also want you to see here is that these two sons that Joseph has, notice the names he calls them. They are not Egyptian names, but they are Hebrew names!

You see, he did not forget the faith of his father's even though he was living in a pagan society.

Thus, he names his firstborn *Manasseh*, which means "*forgetfulness*."

Why would he name his firstborn Manasseh?

We don't have to guess because we are told here in Genesis 41:51, "... 'For God has made me forget all my toil and all my father's house.'"

Joseph did not let the situations he faced these past thirteen years cause him to be bitter, angry, hateful, and-so-on. He did not hold onto the past or should I say he did not let the past hold onto him!

He forgot those things and focused on the Lord and thus, he names his firstborn Manasseh!

His second born son is named *Ephraim*, which means “*fruitfulness.*”

Here, away from home, in difficult situations, God was still able to make Joseph fruitful. As a slave, as a prisoner, as second in command over all of Egypt, God was working because Joseph was walking with the Lord.

And in that God blessed him. Joseph was fruitful!

This is so important for us to understand. I don't care what has happened in your life. What people have done to you. How they have treated you. And I am not trying to be insensitive here, because it could have been really bad!

But let me ask you this. What you have been put through, as tough as it was, how does it compare with what Joseph went through?

I can only speak for myself and the things that I have been through don't even compare to all that Joseph had to endure.

So why can't I let go of things, why can't you let go of things?

Because we refuse to!

Now you may feel that you have been through much more than Joseph. Okay, let's say that you have. Let me give you another example – *JESUS!*

Have you been through more pain, more suffering, more injustice, more people coming against you than Jesus did?

I don't think so!

And what was Jesus' prayer as He hung from the cross of Calvary? "**... 'Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do.'**" Luke 23:34.

And it is out of all that Jesus suffered, that we are told in Ephesians 4:32, "**And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you.**"

How much did Christ forgive you?

Everything! He cast your sins as far as the east is from the west to be remembered no more. And now He wants you to forgive.

We see this also in Colossians 3:12-14, "**Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering; bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do.**"

Forgiveness is not a suggestion; it is a command.

And yet, forgiveness is one of the hardest things to do in life. It is hard to truly forgive someone who has wronged you. It may be especially difficult when the one who harmed you is a brother or sister in Jesus Christ. Yet, God commands His people to forgive, and especially to forgive **one another**.

And here is the thing. Before we see the blessing come in the life of Joseph – before Ephraim was born, there needed to be forgiveness – Manasseh had to be born!

And we can't be doubly fruitful until we are also forgetting, letting those things go.

In his book *The Great Divorce*, C. S. Lewis described hell as a place where no one forgets anything, remembering every slight, every cruel exchange of words, every wrong ever done to them, and everybody is utterly unforgiving. But in heaven all these things are put away, because all things have become new. Let's begin that practice now!

Paul picks up on this in Philippians 3:12-14 and tells us, **“Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me. Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.”**

The Living Bible puts these verses like this. Listen closely to what it says, **“I don't mean to say I am perfect. I haven't learned all I should even yet, but I keep working toward that day when I will finally be all that Christ saved me for and wants me to be. No, dear brothers, I am still not all I should be, but I am bringing all my energies to bear on this one thing: Forgetting the past and looking forward to what lies ahead, I strain to reach the end of the race and receive the prize for which God is calling us up to heaven because of what Christ Jesus did for us.”**

In other words, Paul couldn't change the past and he realized he is not all that he should be, but he also realized that he could change the present and work towards the future by focusing on Christ and not the past. He had to let go, forget about the past and move on to the present and stay focused on Jesus!

He looked to finish the race by focusing on the finish line, by focusing on Jesus and that is what we must do.

The race is long, and it may be difficult at times, and we can lose sight of where we are going. Get refocused upon the Lord and run with joy, move towards the upward calling by which you have been called!

Press on is the point that Paul is making, and we must do that – ***PRESS ON!***

VERSES 53-57

The more you read this story the more you can see the hand of God working here. Maybe not at first with all that Joseph went through, but as time goes by and you have more details of what is happening in his life, you certainly do.

Now the seven years of famine have begun, and it is bad. People don't have food but because of what Joseph did, people came to Egypt to buy food.

Now this is not only affecting Egypt, but also the land of Canaan.

Who is living in Canaan?

And don't say, "***Bob, Steve, Sue . . . !***"

Living in the land of Canaan is Israel (Jacob) and his sons and they too will be affected by this famine, and we will see that next time how the hand of God is working to preserve His people!

As I begin to close this evening, keep in mind that Joseph is no longer a teenager, he is thirty years old! But for Joseph, he is entering the most dangerous period of his life.

How did I come to that conclusion?

Because, for Joseph, he has become a man of power and wealth!

Let me put it like this.

“Joseph’s soul was in greater peril than at any other time in his short life. It is one thing to remain believing and God-centered and faithful in the pit; it is quite another to be faithful at the pinnacle. The pit instilled dependence upon God.

Days, months, and years in the pit graced Joseph’s soul with an ever-deepening sense of need and dependence upon God. There was only one way to look while in the pit, and that was up - to God.

On the other hand, the pinnacle of Egyptian life inclined the soul toward pride and independence. At the top, looking up to God was not so natural. It was far easier then for Joseph to look down on humanity and to depend upon servants to meet his needs.

And the fact that Joseph’s name, speech, clothing, and wife were Egyptian all encouraged him to forget where he came from.

Also, the undeniable brilliance of his interpretation of Pharaoh’s dreams and his plan to spare Egypt could well have begun to give him a sense of mental and moral superiority.”

Yes, that was possible, but we do know the end of the story and Joseph not only started out well, but he finished his life well, serving the Lord and not himself!

And the reason Joseph was able to live out his life for the Lord was because he always kept the proper perspective regarding his life. He was a nobody. It didn’t matter if he was in the pit or second in line to the throne, he was a nobody and God was everything in his life!

We too must keep that perspective unless we think too highly of ourselves, and we fall!

Keep a focus on the eternal and don’t lose focus by being consumed with the temporal!

And I will close with these words from James, “**Humble yourself in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up.**” James 4:10.