

# GENESIS

## 40:1-23

### Genesis 40:1-23

Taught by Simeon Forder on Sunday morning, 2nd May 2024 @ Deal Christian Fellowship

**Reading:** James 1:2-4

### Introduction

This morning we're going to study all of Genesis chapter 40, which means we're continuing to learn *about* and learn *from* the life of Joseph — the man whom this book records the most about.

The prior chapter started the record of Joseph's time in Egypt, having been sold into slavery by his brothers. And we *read* that he was sold into the hand and house of Potiphar, a minister of state in the land of Egypt. But despite all Joseph had been through, and now being a slave in a country he didn't know that spoke a different language to his native tongue, his attitude was impeccable — and God blessed Him in his work, and he was promoted to be master over all Potiphar had — indeed God even blessed Potiphar through all Joseph did.

And we further *read* that Joseph was not only trustworthy in his *work*, but in his *conduct* too — refusing to give in to the demands and seduction of Potiphar's wife — not giving into temptation, and so creating yet another picture of Jesus, who would also be tempted by the devil yet not sin. However, though Joseph acted honourably, he was falsely accused by her, leaving Potiphar no choice but to punish Joseph, and he found himself thrown into Pharaoh's prison. But even while *there*, forgotten and in chains, he was faithful to God, and God was faithful to him — and he became trusted by the master of the prison, being placed in charge of all the prisoners.

Now, again, at so many points, Joseph could have reacted poorly, and his entire future as we know it would have changed. But he acted admirably when first he was sold into slavery. *Then* when he was tested. *Then* when he was falsely accused. And *then* when he was put in prison. Just imagine how he felt after he had acted well, and everything had seemed to go well, to then go back to scratch, with seemingly now no hope of freedom. He could have given up. He could have thrown his toys out of the pram. He could have shaken his fist at God. But rather, *despite* his circumstances, he acted in a godly manner — *still* pleasing God in all he did. And that gave the very possibility of this next step in his life coming to pass. Had he not have acted as he did, this would not have taken place.

So what does happen in this chapter?

## Overview of chapter forty

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- **v1-4** — Background to the Butler and Baker's imprisonment
- **v5-19** — The Butler and Baker's dreams, Joseph's interpretation
- **v20-23** — The fulfilment of those dreams, but Joseph forgotten

Well, in the first 4 verses we'll read that Joseph was joined in prison by two individuals who had fallen out of favour with Pharaoh, the king of Egypt. Then, in verses 5-19, we'll see that it was while in prison under Joseph's care, that these two men both dreamt dreams, which Joseph interpreted *instantly*. And in the final 4 verses we learn that Joseph had interpreted the dreams *accurately*, as one of those two men was restored into Pharaoh's favour as he had said would happen. But where did that leave Joseph? Well, still in prison, for despite his request to have his case brought to the attention of Pharaoh, we read in the closing verse that the butler forgot about him. At least for now.

## Chapter forty

So let's dig into this chapter, for there are some things for us to learn.

### Genesis 40:1-2

It came to pass after these things that the butler and the baker of the king of Egypt offended their lord, the king of Egypt. And Pharaoh was angry with his two officers, the chief butler and the chief baker.

Now, we're not told how the butler and baker offended Pharaoh, but we're told that they did. And, crucially, that this occurred *after* Joseph had been imprisoned. Had that occurred before, then Joseph would not have been there to interpret their dreams, and so his future (and ours) would have looked very different, for his family would not have settled in Egypt for their provision and protection from the famine and people of Canaan — that family of course, being the one whom through the Messiah, our Saviour, would come. But in a situation where timing was everything, God was working behind the scenes, and these men are put into not only the same prison as Joseph, but into his care (as we'll read in a moment)...

**Genesis 40:3**

So he put them in custody in the house of the captain of the guard, in the prison, the place where Joseph was confined.

And so, this wasn't a small deal — when we read that they had offended Pharaoh, they had *really* offended him. And they were thrown into prison where Joseph was confined.

Now, it's possible we might have some notion in our heads — whether from musicals or movies — that Joseph was having a nice time here in prison, in charge of the other prisoners, with a room to himself, a nice desk for his paperwork, and maybe a few books. But it wasn't altogether easy, based on what we read in Psalm 105, which says:

**Psalm 105:17-22**

He sent a man before them— Joseph—who was sold as a slave. They hurt his feet with fetters, He was laid in irons. Until the time that his word came to pass, The word of the LORD tested him. The king sent and released him, The ruler of the people let him go free. He made him lord of his house, And ruler of all his possessions, To bind his princes at his pleasure, And teach his elders wisdom.

So then, this gives us a better understanding of why he would later ask the butler to remember him, and bring his case before Pharaoh, for he had been unjustly sold, and now unjustly imprisoned.

But, as we *read* at the end of the last chapter, *the LORD was with Joseph and showed him mercy, and He gave him favour in the sight of the keeper of the prison. And the keeper of the prison committed to Joseph's hand all the prisoners who were in the prison; whatever they did there, it was his doing.*

And now, we read:

**Genesis 40:4**

And the captain of the guard charged Joseph with them, and he served them; so they were in custody for a while.

Joseph, then, is entrusted with the care of these two men. We're not told how long this was for, but we can be sure that the butler and baker didn't receive their dreams the first night there, for not only does this verse make clear that they were there for a while, but verse 7 also says that Joseph noticed a change in their demeanour following their dreams — a change he could have only noticed after spending some time with them.

Indeed, if they had not been there a while, Joseph would have not gotten to know them — whether their sad demeanour was normal or not. And there is a small but important lesson for us in that, that we also need to spend time with others, and others with us, in order to know each other better. Indeed, if we want a closeness of fellowship, we need to invest in each other more. As Proverbs 18:24 says, *"A man who has friends must himself be friendly"*.

So, who in your church family have you never spoken to? When you look around, do you know the names of other's children, parents, or siblings? Do you know what job each person does for work, or what they've done in the past? What are their likes or hobbies? And how did they come to know the Lord? How have they served Him in the past? How do they serve Him now? More-so, what's going on in their lives right now? How can you be praying for them, or helping them?

If you're going to be a true Christian brother or sister to them, you need to take an interest in them. You need to spend a while with them, that you may know what is normal, and when they need a friend to show up. Fellowship is not simply attending the same church service as other people. That's why our time together after each service is very precious, as are our times of meeting during the week. And why we need to go beyond that, and invite people into our homes, and more importantly into our lives. I'm lacking in this. And I don't think it's unfair to suggest that we all are.

Now, here in Genesis we're going to read on, that having been thrown into the same prison as Joseph, having been entrusted into his care, and having spent some time there. That these men would both receive dreams. Verse 5 says:

**Genesis 40:5**

Then the butler and the baker of the king of Egypt, who were confined in the prison, had a dream, both of them, each man's dream in one night and each man's dream with its own interpretation.

While dreams can be triggered by many things, here, we're going to see that these dreams were not merely triggered by too much cheese or a stressful situation, but that God was working in this — for these two men both had a dream on the same night, both with a shared detail of three things, but with different endings and interpretations.

**Genesis 40:6**

And Joseph came in to them in the morning and looked at them, and saw that they were sad.

Again, Joseph by this point knew them well enough that it was obvious this sadness was not because they were in prison. Something else was troubling them.

**Genesis 40:7**

So he asked Pharaoh's officers who were with him in the custody of his lord's house, saying, "Why do you look so sad today?"

If this *had* been day 1 in jail, they could have replied "Hey, captain obvious, of course we're sad — we've just been thrown into prison!" But having spent a while with them, Joseph both knew them enough to know this was a *change* in their demeanour, *and* that it wasn't their *default* state (like an Eeyore type character). Their sadness was evidence to him that something had occurred. And so Joseph asks the question; "*why do you look so sad today?*"

Now, we'll read their response in the next verse. But pause for a moment. For what would have happened if he hadn't have asked the question? He would have remained in that jail! If he hadn't asked the question, he would not have heard the dreams, nor given the interpretation of the dreams, nor got out of prison himself, or been promoted to second in command of Egypt, nor masterminded Egypt's storing of grain, nor provided for his family who would come in need from Canaan. That's a lot hanging on one question!

But what of us? Are you or I prepared to ask someone why they look so sad? Or are you prepared to ask someone how they're *really* doing? And are you prepared to *listen*? To give your time? Our motivation for doing so should be, as Joseph's was, to be there for others. But, who knows what blessings may come our way as a result!? Indeed, the blessing of friendship comes out of such care for one another, such as it was with Paul, who ministered to the Galatian church, but of who we read they were willing, had it been possible, to pluck out their own eyes and give them to Paul to alleviate the suffering he experiences with his eyesight. Such love!

And *our* love for one another must surely begin with asking in sincerity, and not merely out of making small talk, how the other person really, truly is doing. And not rushing away as they give an honest and vulnerable answer.

Here in verse 8, the butler and baker respond to Joseph's question:

#### **Genesis 40:8**

And they said to him, "We each have had a dream, and there is no interpreter of it." So Joseph said to them, "Do not interpretations belong to God? Tell them to me, please."

So, they give the reason for their sadness. And immediately, Joseph points to the Lord, saying that *God* is the one that can interpret these dreams (as he would later repeat in front of Pharaoh, and as Daniel likewise would turn Nebuchadnezzar's attention toward God). And what an example that is of how *we* should point anyone in their sadness or distress to the Lord, recognising that *He* will be their true source of help. But also willing to let God use him, Joseph asks them to tell him their dreams.

#### **Genesis 40:9-11**

Then the chief butler told his dream to Joseph, and said to him, "Behold, in my dream a vine was before me, and in the vine were three branches; it was as though it budded, its blossoms shot forth, and its clusters brought forth ripe grapes. Then Pharaoh's cup was in my hand; and I took the grapes and pressed them into Pharaoh's cup, and placed the cup in Pharaoh's hand."

So, then, the butler told his dream, which outlined the various stages of the vine in producing grapes. And believe it or not, some critics have tried to pick at this, saying that vines never grew in Egypt, and therefore this is an error in the Bible. But not only is there no necessity for there to have been vines there for something to appear in a *dream*, but there have now been discoveries of paintings in Egypt depicting grapes there anyway. As Finnis Dake put concisely; "*The demands of unbelief are utterly ridiculous at times*". So let's not get sidetracked too much by that.

#### **Genesis 40:12-13**

And Joseph said to him, "This is the interpretation of it: The three branches are three days. Now within three days Pharaoh will lift up your head and restore you to your place, and you will put Pharaoh's cup in his hand according to the former manner, when you were his butler."

Joseph then, having given the glory to God, is then given *by* God the insight to what this dream meant, and first we have this mention of three branches being three days before the butler would be restored to his role and position. And in case you've not noticed the parallel yet, there would also be three days that Jesus body would be in the tomb, before He rose from the dead.

Here, Joseph, confident that what he had spoken to the butler would come to pass, asks him to bring his case before Pharaoh, saying:

#### **Genesis 40:14-15**

But remember me when it is well with you, and please show kindness to me; make mention of me to Pharaoh, and get me out of this house. For indeed I was stolen away from the land of the Hebrews; and also I have done nothing here that they should put me into the dungeon."

And so for the first time we see Joseph state his innocence in the matter with Potiphar's wife, at least, the first time that it is recorded. It would be surprising of course if he hadn't stated his innocence at the time of that false accusation, but that is no doubt deliberately omitted from the record of scripture, that Joseph would point to Jesus who Himself didn't retaliate, or even speak a word in response to the accusations thrown at *Him*.

And Joseph also gives his background to the butler, noting that he was a Hebrew, a detail we will see the butler remember when *finally* telling Pharaoh about Joseph. But first, we read:

#### **Genesis 40:16-17**

When the chief baker saw that the interpretation was good, he said to Joseph, "I also was in my dream, and there were three white baskets on my head. In the uppermost basket were all kinds of baked goods for Pharaoh, and the birds ate them out of the basket on my head."

Hoping for a similar interpretation to the butler, the baker shares his dream. Wanting to be told everything is going to be alright, he is willing to listen. However, the news will not be good — yet Joseph delivers it *anyway*, no doubt convicted that it is better to share the truth than what people *want* to hear (so of course there's a notable reminder in that for us too!). And so we read:

#### **Genesis 40:18-19**

So Joseph answered and said, "This is the interpretation of it: The three baskets are three days. Within three days Pharaoh will lift off your head from you and hang you on a tree; and the birds will eat your flesh from you."

Not what the baker wanted to hear. But look at Joseph's confidence in the matter, for he doesn't ask the *baker* to remember him and bring his case before Pharaoh like he did the butler. That's how certain he is that he has this the right way round! How could he be sure? Because he didn't give the interpretations based on guess or his own judgement, but rather he was certain because these were indeed the actual meanings of those dreams, with the interpretation given to Joseph by God Himself — remember he said "*do not interpretations belong to God?*".

Let us be equally confident in relaying what God has said to *us* through His Word — not doubting it for a moment; whether comforting someone with good news, or delivering with clarity the truth that people need to hear. God's Word will not change. We can rely on it. We can speak it in boldness.

#### **Genesis 40:20**

Now it came to pass on the third day, which was Pharaoh's birthday, that he made a feast for all his servants; and he lifted up the head of the chief butler and of the chief baker among his servants.

And so here is the moment of truth, just as Joseph had spoken, where both these men now stand before the judgment seat of Pharaoh. And we read on:

**Genesis 40:21-22**

Then he restored the chief butler to his butler-ship again, and he placed the cup in Pharaoh's hand. But he hanged the chief baker, as Joseph had interpreted to them.

So then, the interpretation of their dreams that Joseph had given them had proven to be completely accurate — and humanly speaking, what were the chances of that?! The exact timing, the end result — including the method of execution for the baker, and having the interpretations the right way around. This was not an everyday occurrence, and it must have left the butler in awe at this moment, but amazingly we read:

**Genesis 40:23**

Yet the chief butler did not remember Joseph, but forgot him.

So busy was he, living his new life (his relationship with the king restored, and his offence toward the king forgotten), that he forgot all Joseph had said at that low point of his captivity, and all that he asked him to do. How ungrateful, huh?!

But, don't we do the same? Aren't we so busy living our new lives as Christians (having *our* relationship with *the* King restored, and our offence toward *Him* forgotten), that we too have forgotten what the innocent Man — in *our* case, *Jesus* — said to us and asked *us* to do?!

This is why it is so important that we remember what Jesus did through the act of communion, as we have done this morning. Not (I hope) out of routine, but so that we might be reminded of all that Jesus did for us on the cross. And why it is so important that we continually read, study and apply His Word to our lives that we might indeed do what He has commanded us to do.

Now, of course, for Joseph, this must have been *really* difficult — to see his only hope of escape from that prison come to nothing. I doubt we'd be surprised if he struggled to understand what God was doing, or where He was in all this. But God was indeed working here. For what would have happened had Joseph been freed at this moment? Well, he would no doubt would have returned home to his family in Canaan — and then what would have happened when Pharaoh dreamed his dreams? Joseph would have been nowhere to be found. No interpretation, no promotion, no provision for his family in their time of need in the upcoming famine that they knew nothing about.

This then, is a great demonstration of what we read in Romans 8:28, "*that all things work together for good to those who love God*". Not all things *are* good. But all things work together *for* good (to those who love God). Joseph's imprisonment wasn't a good or joyous thing. The ingratitude shown by the butler was not comforting, it wasn't kind, it wasn't fair. But these things worked together not only for Joseph's good, but his family's good, and as we've seen, for our good too.

What we see, and will yet see, in this record of Joseph's life, is that God's timing is perfect. But that's not only true in Joseph's case, but our case also. For God doesn't change. His timing is *still* perfect.



But that begs the question, how do we handle waiting? For it's *certain* that we will have to wait for *something*. Indeed we'll have to wait for *many* things — maybe getting exam results, or finding a job. Maybe finding a spouse, or starting a family. Maybe a medical appointment, or a house move. It is certain that at many if not *all* points of our lives, we will be waiting for *something*. So we need to get good at it! And what example we have in Joseph, for despite all he went through, and all he was hoping for, he didn't throw his toys out of the pram or take matters into his own hands once. He didn't get angry at God when things didn't proceed according to his own timing. Rather, he waited, and trusted.

Why did Joseph have to wait? Well, for one thing God was engineering the circumstances for his good, beyond what he could ever have imagined. But furthermore, I'm sure God was refining this young man into the character God wanted Him to be. To be a man reliant on God, and not in himself.

Imagine for a moment if the 17 year old favourite son had been put second in command in the most powerful nation on the earth at that time, *without* all that we know he did go through! It could have been quite disastrous, as pride may have destroyed him. Imagine if that position and power were the next step a week after his brothers had sold him — oh, what revenge he might have taken! And I've already spoken of the calamity that would have occurred if Joseph were freed the moment the Butler was restored.

These reasons for the waits Joseph endured are easy for us to see, for we know how Joseph's whole life worked out, and all that God did through him. But for Joseph, these things were no doubt very hard to endure. So I'm not going to say that your trials are going to be easy to endure either — they might be really, really tough. But let me say this, that even when things are not panning out how you hoped, or are even excruciatingly hard to endure, don't doubt that God can and will use that situation for good, so long as you are obedient to Him. I'm not even promising that those things will be for *your* good. But they *will* be *for* good in *some* regard. And perhaps, you'll discover the best thing of all in that season of waiting, and that is God Himself.

As I've quoted many times before, Ben Patterson put so very well that:

Perhaps one reason God delays answers to our prayers is because He knows that we need Him, more than the things we ask of Him.

**Ben Patterson**

Surely Joseph pleaded with God for his brothers to treat him kindly, or the Ishmaelites to set him free, or to find some way out of slavery in Egypt, or to find a way out of prison right now. But in all the no's and not-yet's that God uttered, there was incredible kindness God was showing to Joseph, as we'll see in the coming chapters.

## Conclusion

Now, as I wrap up our study today, I don't feel we can move on, without pausing for a moment to consider once again some of the ways in which Joseph points to Jesus, for it really is incredible — and of course, we're not done yet, so we'll come back to this again at some point before we finish our study of Genesis.

Already we've seen how Joseph was loved by his father, just as Jesus was God's beloved Son. How Joseph was a shepherd, just as Jesus is the good shepherd. How Joseph obeyed his father, just as Jesus always did the things that pleased His heavenly Father. And how Joseph was hated by his brethren because of who he was, and because of his words — just as Jesus was.



Of course, Joseph announced he would rule over his brethren, as Jesus presented Himself as the Messiah. Both their words were disbelieved. Joseph was sent by his father to his brethren, went to seek them, and was mocked by them, and wasn't received by them — and we see all these things in Jesus who went to His own who received Him not. And when Joseph was reviled by his brethren, he didn't revile back — just as Jesus acted too.

Both had a distinctive tunic that was taken from them, both were condemned though innocent, and both sold for pieces of silver into the hands of the gentiles by a man of the same name — being Judah and Judas — the same name in the Greek. Both would be servants, though would become the greatest. And both were sorely tempted, though did not sin. Both were falsely accused, but neither spoke a word of defence. And both suffered though innocent, both at the hands of the gentiles. And as Joseph found favour in the sight of the jailor, so the Roman soldier declared "truly this was the Son of God". And we're only getting started!

Indeed, when we look at this chapter, we see that Joseph was numbered with the transgressors, and specifically two are mentioned, just as Jesus had one either side of Him on the cross. One of those two would hear the words of salvation, the other; the words of damnation. And of all professions, we have represented here in Genesis by the baker and butler, the bread and the wine, and the baker of course is told to remember Joseph, as we are told to remember Christ.

These are truly incredible parallels, but let us make some application of it — for as Joseph pointed to Jesus in so many ways, so should we. When people look at our lives, they should see Jesus there too — in our character, our conduct, our manner of life. If someone can look at you or I without the faintest impression that we are a Christian, or that something is different about us, then something is terribly wrong. Let that not be the case — may we point to Jesus in all we do.

## Application questions

Thinking on this chapter then, there are some questions we would do well to ask ourselves in the coming week:

- Are you getting to know others well? Would you notice if they had a bad day or week?
- Are you taking an interest in *all* those in your church?
- Are you so busy living your new life in Christ, forgiven and free, that you've forgotten all He has asked you to do?
- Are you waiting well?

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