

Week Four

Living in the Shelter of a Sovereign God . . .

When You are Promoted

Sometimes the greatest test of your faith and character doesn't come from pain but from promotion. When you're in a pit there is really only one way to look, and that's up – to God. Your need for Him is so obvious there and crying out to Him often becomes a way of life. But when you find yourself at the pinnacle of success, looking up to God isn't so natural. You're need for Him - though unchanged - isn't so obvious. Human applause proves fertile ground for the sins of pride, self-centeredness, and entitlement to grow wild. That heart of yours starts to manufacture idol after idol as your craving for *more* becomes the driving force of your life.

A person whose faith, character, and integrity can remain intact through the fiery trials of pain **and** promotion is an extraordinary person indeed. It's rare to find a man or woman who is just as God-focused and God-dependent in the face of great suffering as they are in the face of great success, but in the last several chapters of the book of Genesis that's exactly what we find. Thirteen long years of slavery are about to end. Joseph will soon ascend from the pit to the palace of the most powerful man in world. That palace will become his workplace . . . that king, his associate . . . that throne, his chair . . . that empire, his stage. And it will all happen in a single chapter!

This is also the week when we will start to understand the “why” behind Joseph's painful past and numerous roadblocks. There have been so many times in my life when I could not see the hand of God in my circumstances - when I could not even begin to understand what in the world He was up to. I love that in those times I could open my Bible to stories like this one and hear the voice of God Himself reminding me and reassuring me that He *really* does have a plan, that He *really* is sovereign, that He *really* is faithful, and that He *really* is working all things together for my good and for His glory. That is exactly what I want you to experience as you “marinate” in the coming weeks. You may not be on your way to the second most powerful position in the world like Joseph was, but I have it on good authority that your life is just as precious, that your circumstances (however hard or confusing they might be) are just as providential, and that God's activity (even when you can't see it) is just as certain.

Day 1

Read **Genesis 41:1-32**. Our focus for the following questions will be on verses 1-14.

- 1) Briefly describe Pharaoh's dreams.
- 2) What effect do the dreams have on Pharaoh? (v. 8)
- 3) Who does Pharaoh call for first and what is their response? (v. 8)
- 4) What *finally* happens in verse 9?
- 5) How does the cupbearer describe Joseph in verse 12?
- 6) Describe what happens in verse 14.

How do you think Joseph felt amidst this sudden whirlwind of activity?

A closer look: "Egyptians were known for their careful attention to personal cleanliness and contrary to the customs of the Hebrews and others, the Egyptians only allowed a beard and hair to grow as a sign of mourning, which was the reverse of the custom of the Hebrews, who shaved both as a sign of mourning."¹

- 7) Why was this the perfect timing for the cupbearer to remember Joseph and make good on his promise to mention him to Pharaoh? How might the outcome have been different if the cupbearer had mentioned Joseph immediately after he was restored to his office?

- 8) What important truth about God from **Isaiah 55:9** is revealed both here and throughout the entire Joseph narrative?

- 9) How does Joseph's life so far reflect the truths of **Isaiah 40:28-31**?

How does *your* life so far reflect these truths?

- 10) It's so easy for us to mistake God's delays for His denials. How does this part of Joseph's story encourage you to remain confident in God's perfect faithfulness when you are forced to wait and it's really hard to see Him working in your circumstances?

Day 2

Read **Genesis 41:14-32** and answer the following questions.

- 1) What had Pharaoh been told about Joseph? (v. 15)
- 2) How does Joseph respond to the king in verse 16?

Why is this a bold/courageous response?

Would you expect anything different from Joseph? Why or why not?

- 3) What is the interpretation of the dreams?
- 4) What does Joseph go out of his way to clearly communicate to Pharaoh at the beginning, middle, and end of the interpretation? (vv. 25, 28, and 32)

A closer look: It's important to know that in Egypt, Pharaoh was thought to be a divine being who was able to influence other gods (lots of them!) through magic to ensure good weather, fertile crops, and overall prosperity. For Joseph to continually lift high the name of the one true God before this incredibly powerful king who was himself thought to be divine is remarkable to say the least.

- 5) How do you think Joseph was able to courageously speak the name of God in such a pagan environment?

- 6) What was the significance of the repeating of the dream to Pharaoh twice? (v. 32)

- 7) Who else in this narrative had two dreams that had one-in-the-same meaning? (37:6-10)

- 8) At that time, Egypt was one of the most powerful places in the world and was governed by one of the most powerful men in the world, but even Egypt and Pharaoh were subject to the sovereign rule of God. How might this encourage you today?

A closer look: Don't miss the fact that Joseph has boldly declared to the most powerful man in the world that the future of his great nation is totally out of his hands. The matter is determined by *God* and *God* will bring it about! As Kent Hughes puts it, "Kings do not make history. Rather, God uses them to effect history." There is not a single purpose of God that a king or government has the power to overturn. As Proverbs 21:1 declares, "The king's heart is like channels of water in the hand of the Lord; He turns it wherever He wishes." Only God is all-powerful. He alone is sovereign. Next time you turn on the news and are disgusted and outraged by choices that our government officials are making, make sure you keep this truth in mind.

- 6) Describe how Joseph is “Egyptianized” in the following areas:
- Hair (v. 14):
- Clothing (v. 42):
- Name (v. 45):
- Wife (v. 45):
- 7) What potential spiritual dangers did Joseph face as he was promoted from the pit to the palace?
- 8) Can you think of any examples of good people who have been corrupted by success and power? (These don’t have to be biblical examples.)
- Why do you think success and power can have such a detrimental effect on a person’s character?
- 9) In your opinion, what would Joseph have to do in order to keep his *heart* from being “Egyptianized”? (Though written long after Joseph’s time, **1 Thessalonians 5:15-22** offers some great insight if you need it.)
- 10) **You** have been set apart by God to make an impact on a world that is just as pagan as Joseph’s Egypt. What are you doing to safeguard yourself and your family against potential spiritual dangers? How are you leaving yourself and your family exposed to worldly influences?

11) Read **Romans 12:2** and fill in the blanks:

“Do not be _____ to this world, but be _____ by the _____ of your _____.”

So in order to resist conformity to the patterns (customs, values, priorities) of this world, you have to continually be renewing/reprogramming your mind to think in a godly, biblical way. In what way(s) are you currently doing this?

What’s at risk if you aren’t?

Day 4

Read **Genesis 41:46-57** and answer the following questions.

- 1) How much time has passed since Joseph was sold into slavery? (compare 41:46 with 37:2)
- 2) How does God bless Joseph in his work at this time? (v. 49, 54)
- 3) How does God bless Joseph in his family at this time? (v. 50)
- 4) Write the names of Joseph’s two sons in the order in which they are born and give the meaning of their names.
- 5) What do these names reveal about the condition of Joseph’s heart?

A closer look: While Joseph had been fully Egyptianized at this point (hair, clothes, name, wife, etc.), he chose to give his children *Hebrew* names thereby publically reaffirming his ethnic and spiritual origin as well as testifying to the faithfulness of his God.

- 6) With the naming of his firstborn Joseph declares that God has made him forget the trouble of his past and his father's household. It's obvious in the chapters that follow that his memories of his past are still very vivid, so what do you think he means by this?

- 7) How has God made Joseph fruitful in the land of affliction?

- 8) Describe your own "Manasseh" and/or "Ephraim" experience(s). How has God taken the sting out of your painful memories? How has He made you fruitful in very difficult and seemingly barren circumstances?

- 9) How do verses 55-57 set the stage for Joseph's own dreams to come to pass . . . thirteen long, agonizing years later?

Day 5

Today we are going to fast forward a bit to the worst part of the famine. At this point, Joseph has been reunited with his family and has provided a portion of land in Egypt for them to dwell. The reason we are tackling this passage now is because it lends some valuable insight into how Joseph handled his position of power and how God used his painful past to secure a profitable future.

Read **Genesis 47:13-28** and answer the following questions.

- 1) Write down any words and/or phrases in the following verses that the narrator uses to convey how severe the famine was at this point.

Verse 13:

Verse 15:

Verse 18:

Verse 20:

- 2) How did Joseph handle the total collapse of the Egyptian monetary system? (vv. 15-17)
- 3) What did the people ask Joseph to do once they no longer had any livestock with which to barter? (v. 18, 19)
- 4) How did Pharaoh ultimately benefit from this horrible famine? (v. 20)
- 5) What was the final phase of Joseph's plan to preserve the nation of Egypt and the lives of the Egyptian people? (vv. 23, 24)

- 6) Here's a recap: The people have completely run out of food, the monetary system has collapsed, and the entire world is in danger of starvation. What adjectives would you use to describe Joseph and his leadership throughout these tumultuous times?
- 7) How would you describe the people's overall feelings about Joseph? (v. 25)

What insight does this give into his character and leadership abilities?

- 8) When I was growing up there was a framed Corrie Ten Boom quote hanging in our bathroom right in front of the toilet. (Needless to say, I read it a LOT over the years!) It said, **"Every experience God gives us, every person He puts in our lives is the perfect preparation for the future that only He can see."** Looking back over the entire narrative, how is this principle reflected in Joseph's life so far?

How has it been reflected in yours?

¹ Freeman, J. M. and H. J. Chadwick. *Manners and Customs of the Bible* (North Brunswick, NJ: Bridge-Logos Publishers, 1998), 77.