

JANUARY 18

Genesis 39, 40, 41

Today you read Genesis 39-41. The first thing that I want you to notice this morning is the way in which the Biblical account of Joseph accurately reflects what we now know from Egyptian documents to be the culture and political situation in Egypt during the Middle Kingdom period. The details of the story fit perfectly with all that we know of these times. From about 1710 BC until about 1570 BC, Egypt was ruled by foreign Pharaohs known as the Hyksos. These Hyksos were Semites - related to the Hebrews - and during this time it would have been especially easy for non-Egyptians to rise to high office. If, in fact, Joseph does fit into this Hyksos period, it could explain why we are specifically told that Potiphar was an 'Egyptian.' In all other periods of Egyptian history that information would be redundant.

The titles used in this account are the same as we now know from other Egyptian documents of the period. Pharaohs had 'chief cupbearers' and 'chief bakers.' The most striking parallel is in the name that Pharaoh gave to Joseph - the name Zaphemath - Panech. That title has been found in Egyptian inscriptions relating to a festival procession. It seems to mean the "Head of the Sacred College" - the leader of all the priests.

The account mentions a signet ring that we know the Pharaohs wore, and the robes that Pharaoh gave to Joseph to wear. Those robes are pictured for us in drawings found in tombs of the period and it says that Joseph was given a chariot - an interesting touch because it was just at this period that the light chariot of war was introduced to Egypt. (1. Clifford Wilson; That Incredible Book; p.78ff)

The customs are right as well. For example, we are specifically told that Joseph had to shave before appearing in front of the Pharaoh. We know that that was always the case.

In short, so many details, titles, customs, and points of information are correct that it is utterly inconceivable that this account is anything other than a contemporary record of what really happened. Well, so much for background material. There is much also for us to notice in this passage.

Twice we are told that Joseph prospered in Potiphar's house, then again in prison, because the Lord was with him. And in these situations, the ones for whom he labored prospered also. "*The Lord blessed the household of the Egyptian because of Joseph.*" That is a principle we've seen before - Lot was blessed as long as he stayed with Abraham - Laban was blessed because of the presence of Jacob - Potiphar is blessed because of Joseph. They are rediscovering the principle today in China and Russia, where true Christian employees are a highly desirable commodity, because when God blesses the employees, the employer benefits as well. There is nothing quite as valuable as a truly righteous employee, because God blesses you as He blesses them.

Then comes Potiphar's wife. She sees him, she sees that he is big and strong and has God's blessing. So she tempts him and he does the exact RIGHT thing. Before we go further, I want to ask you if there might be sexual temptation in your life right now. Is there a person who is not your spouse that is after you? Do internet sites seem to beckon to you to indulge? Joseph had the right idea. RUN AWAY!!! Get out of the situation. Leave the room. Take a cold shower. Quit the relationship if you have to. Quit the job if you must. Lose the computer if that is what it takes. But don't give yourself to the temptress.

Joseph handled this one perfectly BUT - and it is a big but - being faithful and experiencing God's blessing is never a guarantee that trouble will not follow. Joseph honors God in Potiphar's household and ends up in prison. Joseph honors God in prison and ends up being forgotten. Can't you imagine him saying to God - "I even honored you back in Canaan - that got me sold into slavery. Lord, what's going on???"

Has that ever happened to you? You did what you knew was right and still ended up in trouble?

In that kind of situation a great many of us would begin to nurse our wounds and to carry a large root of bitterness in our spirits. Joseph could have done that but he did not. Instead he trusts God and lives by his principles of integrity and honor. What a contrast to the young and the middle aged Jacob who trusted no one and lived by the power of his wit.

For thirteen very long years, Joseph is absolutely in the dark about what God is doing in his life. It was the hymn writer William Cowper who said, "God moves in a mysterious way, his wonders to perform..." To that Joseph would surely have said AMEN! We do not know what went through his mind - we have no record of his searching, agonizing prayers - but we do know that his behavior and commitment to principle never wavered. He did what was right - He honored God and he waited.

Now I cannot know what setbacks you have had to endure or what strange and unfathomable providences you have experienced, but I do know that Joseph stands as a model to each one of us. He trusted God and waited. There is this wonderful verse in I Peter 5 - it says, "*Humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God that He may exalt you at the proper time.*" That's what Joseph did and the proper time came and God honored him! Are you waiting and in the dark right now? Stay humble before God and he will lift you up!

So Joseph is in jail. And God speaks in an unusual way. Have you noticed how often God has used dreams to reveal Himself and to communicate with men in the Book of Genesis? We have now seen at least five different modes of revelation: direct speech - God just speaks, as apparently He did to Abraham at Mt. Moriah; we have seen visions, like the one Abraham had at the

initiation of the covenant; we have seen theophanies - God just Showing up himself (Genesis 18 where God met Abraham by the Oak of Mamre); we have seen God reveal Himself through angels (as we see in Lot's rescue from Sodom) and in dreams. Let's see how many instances of dream revelation we can recall together. In Chapter 20, God spoke to Abimelech, a pagan king, in a dream. Later, Jacob's very first encounter with God at Bethel was in a dream; then again when it was time for him to leave his father-in-law's household. In a dream, Laban is warned not to harm Jacob. Young Joseph has dreams, though we are never explicitly told that they come from God. Now Pharaoh has dreams, which Joseph attributes to God's desire to reveal His plan to Pharaoh. As we progress further through the Old Testament, we will find God from time to time using the vehicle of dreams to reveal His word and purpose to men. Most of the time, this seems to be His favorite method of revealing Himself to those who are the furthest from Him and the least able to handle more direct forms of instruction. This, for example, explains why it is through dreams that God first makes contact with Nebuchadnezzar. The Book of Hebrews, in its very first paragraph, explains why this method of revelation, while still theoretically possible, is much less likely to be used by God to communicate today. Hebrews 1 says, "*God who in many parts and many ways spoke in times past to the fathers has in these last days spoken to us by His Son.*" God's revelation in Christ and in the Bible which speaks of Him, is so full, so complete, and in some ways so final, that we don't need the kind of revelation the patriarchs had. But even today in our world, people without the Bible may need that kind of revelation, and we hear stories from the mission field and from countries without the Bible many indicators that God still uses that method.

Oh, I almost forgot to tell you about the seven cows of Pharaoh's dreams. You know already that the Egyptians worshipped many gods and goddesses, one was the goddess of love - Hathor the cow. As you can imagine archaeologists see a lot of old cow pictures in Egyptian excavations and sometimes they see seven cows to represent the seven major regions of Egypt. God used concepts and images that Pharaoh already knew to get his attention. And in the morning Pharaoh discovered that the priests of Hathor couldn't tell him what the dream meant, but the God of Joseph could because He was the one true God.

Not only did Joseph rightly predict the famine, but the gods of Egypt would all be exposed as impotent before the God and before long, Moses shows up and accelerates this.

This has been Mark Ashton reminding you that People don't live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.