

GOD REVEALS HIS SOVEREIGN WILL

Genesis 40:1-41:57
Key Verse: 41:51,52

Lesson 15b

Joseph named his firstborn Manasseh and said, 'It is because God has made me forget all my trouble and all my father's household.' The second son he named Ephraim, 'It is because God' has made me fruitful in the land of my suffering.'

This lesson begins with Joseph at the lowest point of his life. He is a slave in a foreign land, and he is in prison, accused of a crime which he did not commit. There is no one to whom he can turn; he has no clout--except God. From a human point of view, he has no hope of getting out. But God's plan for Joseph was slowly unfolding. If he had not been thrown in prison, he might have lived and died as a faithful servant in Potiphar's house--and no more. But through his prison experience God opened the way for him to become prime minister of all Egypt, second only to Pharaoh. This was a time of testing for Joseph. Could he handle prison? and even more, could he handle being ruler of Egypt? Proverbs says, "Under three things the earth trembles, under four it cannot bear up: A servant who becomes a king, a fool who is full of food, an unloved woman who is married and a maidservant who displaces her mistress." Joseph was a servant who became a king. Would he forget God? Would he become proud and useless?

1. A shepherd and Bible teacher in prison (40:1-23)

Joseph was put in the prison where the king's prisoners were kept. This prison must have been under the authority of Potiphar, the captain of the king's guard--and Joseph's master. Joseph did not hold a grudge against Potiphar or his wife. He did not allow hatred and anger at the injustice that had been perpetrated on him to paralyze him. He did not despair or give up. He overcome himself and depended on God, and God was with him in prison. Soon he was in charge of the prison. 39:22 says that "the warden put Joseph in charge of all those held in prison and he was made responsible for all that was done there. The warden paid no attention to anything under Joseph's care, because the Lord was with Joseph and gave him success in whatever he did." If Joseph had doubted God's love, or allowed bitterness to fill his heart, he could not have won the victory. A man must win the victory over himself if he is to be victorious in life. Joseph could win this victory over himself because he knew that God was with him. He did not understand what God was doing, and he couldn't find meaning in his suffering at the time, but he trusted God and lived before him--and did his best to be a faithful steward of the prison.

Sometime later, two of Pharaoh's officials were put in the prison where

Joseph was. They were political prisoners, so they were put in the king's prison. One was the king's cupbearer and the other, the king's baker. While these jobs may seem to be menial, actually they were very high level jobs. The cupbearer was frequently in the king's presence. He had to be a trustworthy man. The baker's position also gave him access to the king's food. He was in a position to poison the king. We are not told anything about what these men were accused of, or whether they are guilty or innocent. The main point is that Joseph was put in charge of them. They became his sheep. He did not take care of them in a superficial way; he was sensitive to their needs. One day he noticed that they looked depressed. When he talked with them, he found that they had each had a dream. They realized that their dreams had some special meaning, but they had no one to interpret them. At that time there was no written Bible, so God used dreams as a means of revealing his will to men. God had given these two men a special revelation through their dreams, but they didn't understand what he was saying to them. So they needed a "Bible teacher." Joseph taught them that interpretations belong to God. He then listened to their dreams and as God's servant, told them the meaning.

The two dreams were very similar in many ways--and very different. The cupbearer's dream was good news--his head would be lifted up and he would be restored to his former position within three days. But the baker's dream was bad news: His head would also be lifted up--on a gallows--in three days. Joseph did not mince words. He told each man the meaning of his dream. He was God's servant, and he did not try to sugar-coat the bad news. Then he asked the cupbearer to remember him when he was restored to his former position serving Pharaoh. Things happened just as Joseph had said, but sheep are sheep and the cupbearer completely forgot about his shepherd Joseph.

2. A Bible teacher and shepherd for Pharaoh (41:1-40)

Two full years after the cupbearer's release, Pharaoh had a dream. It was a powerful dream, and it was clearly God's message to Pharaoh, but Pharaoh could not understand it. His dream troubled him, so he sent for all the wise men in his kingdom to tell him the meaning of the dream, but no one could interpret it. Then the cupbearer remembered Joseph.

Joseph was brought out of the dungeon to stand before Pharaoh. This was his chance! Joseph however, didn't try to impress Pharaoh. He told him the truth. He said, "I can't interpret dreams, but God will give Pharaoh the answer he desires." Then Joseph listened to the dream. Seven skinny cows came out of the Nile River and ate up seven fat cows. Then, a second dream followed. Seven skinny ears of corn ate up seven fat, plump ears of corn.

Joseph told Pharaoh, "God has revealed to Pharaoh what he is going to do." If Pharaoh had been a proud man, like most of the Egyptian Pharaohs, he could have become angry at the mention of God. Pharaohs thought that they were God. But Pharaoh didn't seem to object to Joseph's testimony about God. He listened carefully. Joseph told him that God had firmly decided to grant Egypt seven years of abundant crops, followed by seven years of severe famine. In other words, God, not Pharaoh, controlled Egypt. Joseph then added some advice which the king had not asked for: He advised the king to put some one in charge of the agriculture of Egypt and strictly gather grain during the years of plenty so that there would be enough to eat in the years of famine. Pharaoh did not become angry at Joseph's presumption. Instead, he did a surprising thing! He said, "Can we find anyone like this man, one in whom is the Spirit of God?" And he put Joseph in charge of the whole land of Egypt!

3. Joseph becomes steward of Egypt (41:41-57)

Joseph went out from Pharaoh's presence with Pharaoh's signet ring on his finger. He was dressed like a prince and given a late model chariot for his personal use. He was second only to Pharaoh in the land of Egypt. Whenever he rode around the streets of the capitol, someone ran before him shouting, "Make way!" Pharaoh put him in charge of the whole land of Egypt. Pharaoh said, "I am Pharaoh, but without your word no one will lift a hand or foot in all Egypt." From a slave to a king in a day! It was enough to make any man proud. But what did Joseph do? He didn't make a list of those who had wronged him and get revenge. (Potiphar's wife would have headed the list!) He went out from Pharaoh's presence and traveled throughout Egypt. He began immediately to make plans for mobilizing Egypt for the famine that would occur after seven years.

Pharaoh introduced him to a beautiful girl to be his wife. She was a very religious person, the daughter of the high priest. For seven years both Joseph and Egypt prospered. Joseph firmly believed God's word: There would be a famine. To most people, it seemed as if the times of prosperity would go on forever. Sometimes, it was as difficult to believe that there would really be a severe famine as it had been for Noah to believe that there would be a flood.

By faith, Joseph stored up grain and kept careful records until there was so much grain that it was impossible to keep records. It was like the sand of the sea.

During that time, God blessed Joseph with two sons. He named the first one Manasseh, which means "forget." Joseph thanked God who made him forget all of his trouble and sorrow that he had experienced at the hands of his brothers. He could have remembered their jealousy and all of the small ways they had tormented him. He could have harbored deep hatred for them for tearing him away from his loving father and selling him as a slave in a foreign land. But he turned those feelings and thoughts over to God. God healed him and filled him with joy. His second son he named Ephraim, which means "twice fruitful." God had not only healed his deep heart wounds, but God had made his life very fruitful. He said, "God has made me fruitful in the land of my suffering." He didn't deny that he had suffered in Egypt. He

was realistic about his life. But he acknowledged God's sovereignty and praised God for the blessings he had poured out on him. God fulfilled the promises of the dreams in the life of a man who held those dreams in his heart. God healed the heart of the man who accepted God's love and gave thanks to God in all circumstances. God was with Joseph in Egypt. He trained him until he could be a blessing to Egypt and to all the world--and especially to God's chosen people. God was working out his purpose for the descendants of Abraham.