

Session 4

February 13, 2022

THE PITFALL OF HARD TIMES

Genesis 41:28-32, 47-54

The story of Joseph is filled with twists and turns. It's been about 13 years since he was taken from his homeland and carried off to Egypt, and very little has gone his way. By chapter 41, Joseph has been favored by his father, hated by his brothers, sold into slavery, made the head of Potiphar's house, thrown into Potiphar's dungeon, put in charge of the other prisoners, interpreted the dreams of the cupbearer and baker, and been forgotten by those he helped the most. But there is a constant theme throughout the story: God is with him. While the rest of the world has forgotten Joseph, God has not. In fact, God is actually at work in Joseph's life.

Chapter 41 opens with more dreams. This time they formed in the sleeping mind of Pharaoh, king of Egypt. I outlined the chapter this way:

First, there were **cows and corn** (vv. 1-7)—These were the main symbols in Pharaoh's dreams. Then came **morning and magicians** (v. 8)—All the king's wisemen couldn't help him!

Next, there were **cupbearers and recollections** (vv. 9-13)—After "two full years," the butler finally remembered Joseph down in the dungeon.

This was followed by **honor and humility** (vv. 14-16)—As Joseph was cleaned up and dressed up to meet the king. That's where we pick up the focal passages (more or less!).

Warning and witness (vv. 25-32). Ironically, it was a famine in their homeland that brought Jacob's family to Egypt in the first place. Egypt was home to the great Nile valley, an exceptionally fertile region that benefitted from the river's annual flooding. Hence, when no one else had any food, Egypt thrived. God used two simple objects to illustrate the same lesson (v. 25). The fat and healthy represented good years; the lean and ugly represented bad years (v. 27). Notice the *warning* Joseph gave: the famine would be incredibly severe. The people would quickly forget the prosperity they enjoyed, for the land would be devastated (v. 30). Notice as well, the *witness* Joseph gave: "The matter has been determined by God, and He will carry it out" (v. 32).

Wisdom and work (vv. 33-36; 47-49). While Joseph had Pharaoh's attention and respect, he took the opportunity to give godly wisdom as well. Rather than dwell on the dreams themselves, it was time to act. The principle was obvious: take advantage of the prosperous years to prepare for the lean years (vv. 33-36). But all the great ideas in the world do no good if they are not acted upon! By God's providence, Joseph was placed in charge. The abundance of the first seven years was stored throughout the region in designated cities (v. 48). God so prospered their harvest that Joseph himself quit keeping track of the amount of grain that was put into storage. It was simply too much to keep track of! (v. 49).

Honor and humility (vv. 37-45; 50-53). The exaltation of Joseph was clearly a work of God. But Joseph clearly gave God the glory, for even Pharaoh pointed it out (see vv. 38-39). Now, Pharaoh honored Joseph as well. He gave him his signet ring, his fine clothes, a gold chain, a chariot to ride in, a new name (which more or less means "One like a god who saves") and a new

wife (whose name means “favorite of the gods”). While Joseph would not have chosen that name—or that bride—for himself, they were given by the king as a sign of great honor. But in a move that let everyone know Joseph’s true allegiance, he gave his sons names that honored both his Hebrew ancestry and his Hebrew God (vv. 51, 52).