

Grace to You :: esp Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time

Joseph: The Precision of God's Sovereignty

Scripture: Genesis 39:23; Genesis 40:14–23

Code: B140528

With the fear and uncertainty generated by the current COVID-19 pandemic, we consider this series by John MacArthur to be even more timely now than when it was first run six years ago. The following blog post was originally published on May 28, 2014. —ed.

It sounds strange, but even in prison Joseph experienced the Lord's blessing. His administrative skills were noticed by the warden, and soon he was placed in charge of all prison operations. Joseph was so competent and efficient that "the chief jailer did not supervise anything under Joseph's charge because the Lord was with him; and whatever he did, the Lord made to prosper" (Genesis 39:23).

After some royal intrigue, Pharaoh's cupbearer and chief baker arrived at the prison. Whatever the nature of their crimes, the baker and the cupbearer were put in prison to await Pharaoh's verdict.

One night, each man had a dream so troubling and extraordinary that they were still upset the next day. When Joseph asked the cause of their consternation, each recounted his dream. In response, Joseph correctly interpreted each dream—a life-changing message of restoration for the cupbearer and a life-ending message of condemnation for the baker.

The Genesis account makes it clear that God was the one who gave the men their dreams and gave Joseph the accurate interpretations. Like Daniel centuries later, Joseph knew that he had no natural ability to tell the future (Daniel 2:27–30). The Lord revealed the true interpretation so that His power might be displayed and His purposes fulfilled.

After interpreting the cupbearer's dream, Joseph specifically asked the man not to forget about him:

Keep me in mind when it goes well with you, and please do me a kindness by mentioning me to Pharaoh and get me out of this house. For I was in fact kidnapped from the land of the Hebrews, and even here I have done nothing that they should have put me into the dungeon. (Genesis 40:14–15)

Twice before, Joseph had been unjustly treated by other people: first, by his own brothers and then by Potiphar's wife. This time he entrusted himself to Pharaoh's cupbearer. And again, he would be let down. The cupbearer was indeed restored to Pharaoh's service, but he was indifferent to Joseph's plight and "forgot him" (Genesis 40:23).

But God had not forgotten or abandoned him. Nor would the Lord allow the cupbearer's forgetfulness to last indefinitely. The time was coming when Pharaoh would need someone who could interpret dreams. Right on cue, in the unfolding of this divinely ordained drama, the cupbearer would remember his extraordinary prison experience. God's plan for Joseph was coming together exactly as He intended.

One night Pharaoh awoke in a cold sweat, startled by the most vivid and terrible nightmare he had ever experienced. In his dream, Pharaoh found himself on the banks of the Nile River, with seven beautiful, healthy cows feeding in a meadow nearby. The scene was peaceful and serene. Suddenly, like something from a horror movie, seven skinny cows rushed into the field, attacked the fat cows, and ate them! Even after devouring the fat cows, the skinny cows remained as ugly and gaunt as before. The frightening images were enough to wake Pharaoh from his sleep. Later that night, a second nightmare repeated the same shocking pattern, except instead of cows, seven plump heads of grain were gobbled up by seven thin, withered heads.

The next day, the king was deeply troubled. He was even more disturbed when none of his magicians or wise men could interpret the dream. The alarming situation was enough to jog the cupbearer's poor memory. Pharaoh wasted no time in securing Joseph's release. He was given a change of clothes and a quick shave, and was rushed into Pharaoh's presence.

After Pharaoh recounted his dream, the Lord revealed its meaning through Joseph. Both dreams depicted the same future reality—there would be seven years of plenty followed by seven years of famine. If the Egyptians were to be ready for the coming catastrophe, they would have to begin storing up resources immediately. Moreover, a man with administrative skill and managerial experience would be needed to organize the collection and storage effort.

Clearly, God had orchestrated Joseph's past experiences and trials for that moment. If his brothers had not sold him into slavery, he would not have been brought down to Egypt. If Potiphar had not purchased him from the slave market, he would not have gained the experience he needed to manage people and commodities within an Egyptian context. If he had not been falsely accused and sent to prison, he would not have interpreted the cupbearer's dream. And if that had not happened, he would not have been summoned by the Pharaoh on this divinely appointed day. His responsibilities in Potiphar's house and in the jailhouse prepared him for his new role in Pharaoh's house.

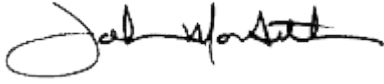
The Lord had overseen all those events to bring him to this one moment—when Joseph would be ready to organize a national food drive, saving millions from starvation. Pharaoh recognized God's hand on Joseph, and immediately knew the former prisoner should run the food-gathering operations for his empire.

Joseph's life is an important reminder for each of us: There are no accidents. As the Author of history, the Lord orchestrates all events to bring about His will. In triumph as well as tragedy, He directs our steps to put us where and when He wants us for His sovereign purposes. And while we may not experience the radical ups and downs of Joseph's life, we can rest in the knowledge that even the most insignificant event is a divine appointment in the hands of the Lord.

That truth is dramatically displayed in Joseph's story. In one day, his fortunes had been completely reversed. That morning, he woke up in his prison cell. By evening, he went to sleep in the palace. Thirteen years earlier, he came to Egypt as a lowly slave, but now, at the age of thirty, he had become the second-most-powerful ruler in the land. None of it was coincidence—the Lord was in control at every turn, and His sovereign plan was not yet fully revealed.

Undoubtedly, even at this time of exaltation, Joseph still wondered about his father and his brothers back in Canaan. What would they think if they could see him now? And what of the dreams God had given him when he was still at home? The Lord had revealed to him the meaning of other people's visions. But what about his own?

It would be several years before the Lord would make His true purposes known to Joseph. Next time we'll look at the conclusion of the story, and just how crucial a part Joseph played in God's sovereign plans.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Joseph', with a stylized, flowing script.

(Adapted from [*Twelve Unlikely Heroes*](#).)

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