

Joseph Interprets Dreams and Rises to Power
Genesis 40-41 (41:37-42,50-52)
Week 4

Opening

Be sure to hop onto the video call a bit early so group members aren't anxiously, awkwardly waiting. Remember you are the host, so just as if you were welcoming folks into your home, use these first few moments to welcome each participant by name. It means a lot to acknowledge everyone on the call and confirm you can see and hear them.

-if there are new folks joining your group, be sure to introduce them as well

Ask if anyone would like to open in prayer. They can pray on their own or use the prayer printed below. It also might be a good idea to reach out to a group member prior to your meeting and ask them ahead of time if they'd be willing to open in prayer. That's a great way to encourage participation without putting anyone on the spot. I like the consistency of praying the same pray to center ourselves each week, but once again, feel free to have someone pray differently to open this week.

Holy God, as we gather again virtually, we ask that you Spirit would be at work among us to connect us and renew us by your Word and our fellowship. Give us wisdom and insight and strengthen our bonds with one another and you. In the name of our risen Lord we pray, Amen.

Depending on time constraints you may want to take a bit of extra time to check in with folks and see how they're doing. You could also wait and do this at the end of the session before closing in prayer.

Check-in question

Has there been a time in your life when you "chose your own adventure" believing you knew what was best and not consulting the Living God? How did that turn out? Would you do anything differently?

*since we're doing these meetings on Zoom, some groups may want to add an extra activity to help folks feel at ease. There are some great games out there that you can play via Zoom. Reach out to Sarah if this is something you'd like to try out.

Read: (see attachment on "Ideas for Lengthy Passages") Either all of ch.40 and 41 or the text Ryan preached on or something else all together

In addition to the broader questions below, I am including some other information about this passage and some other ideas to get conversation going; however, don't jump too

quickly to these as they shape the discussion. Be sure to first ask what the group thinks, and which parts stand out to them. Trust the Holy Spirit here !

CHAPTER 40

Cupbearer – the duties of the cupbearer would have been to vouch for the wine, stand near the king, keep his cup filled, and be prepared to offer information and advice. Egyptian documents confirm that this was a significant position in the Egyptian court. **Chief Baker**– not as exalted as the cupbearer but also had a sensitive role in preparing the king's food.

From Near Eastern sources we know that dream interpretation was a major “science,” practiced by sages, diviners, and soothsayers kept on the staffs of kings and sanctuaries. But Israel took a dim view of the machinations of professional dreamers and interpreters, as it did of magic in general. False prophecy was associated with dreams and fake interpretations (Deut. 13:105). Yet, **Israel shared with its neighbors the underlying conviction that God uses dreams to send messages to people.**

v.8 – an audacious claim is placed in the mouth of Joseph. It is asserted that dream interpretation belongs to God and to God alone. Dreams are not to be handled by human wisdom, by imperial administration, or by analytical decoding. They are rather the in-breaking of other purposes known only in the mystery of God. Pharaoh, like every other imperial master, presumes a monopoly on knowledge. But in these dreams, knowledge is of another kind. And pharaoh has no part in it. Pharaoh knows many things, but he does not know how to discern the movement of God's way. Only God knows that.

These dreams are not ends in themselves. Don't get too caught up in that. They are means in the narrative to speak about a new understanding of the future. The future is inscrutably in God's hands and not human hands. The men in Joseph's prison (it is Joseph's prison, not Pharaoh's) are not fated, as though all things were settled. Nor are they free, as though they could decide. The narrative moves beyond both imperial fatedness and human freedom to the ***mystery of God's way.***

CHAPTER 41

Everything that has transpired in the jailhouse with the servants of Pharaoh now happens at a more elaborate level with the king himself and Pharaoh is trouble by two separate dreams.

v.14 – Shaving the head or the face is often a punitive act in the Old Testament, but Egyptian tomb paintings and statues suggest that the smooth-shaven look was the norm in that hotter country. Joseph's clothing has been a part of this story all along. His clothes have almost caused his ruin, beginning with his coat of many colors and including the garment that ended up in the hand of Potiphar's wife. Now the new clothes mean a fresh start.

v.16 – even before he hears about the dream from Pharaoh’s own lips, Joseph disclaims his own role in the interpretation, and assures the king in advance that God’s message to him will be favorable. **Was this just good political sense, or had Joseph already had intuition or information about the dream?**

v.40 – In an instant Pharaoh elevates the lowly Hebrew prisoner to the second officer of the land. All the emblems of authority are put upon him. He receives Pharaoh’s signet ring, his power-of-attorney as it were, so that he can issue documents in the king’s name. he gets new clothes again, finer than before, a gold chain, and a place in the second chariot.

Remind folks of this claim and how it might ring true in the passage for the week:

Walter Brueggemann names the singular theological claim in the Joseph story is “the purposes of God are at work in hidden and unnoticed ways, but the ways of God are nonetheless reliable and will come to fruition.” This can be the place we come back to each week as we explore the story of Joseph.

1. What from this story confuses, inspires, or resonates with you? What questions or curiosities do you have about this passage?
2. What does this story tell us about God?
3. What does this story tell us about humanity?
4. In what ways does this particular passage relate to Brueggemann’s idea of God’s purposes? How might God’s providence already be at work here?
5. What could this story have to say to us today in the 21st century? What about today during this global pandemic?

The Swedish Method



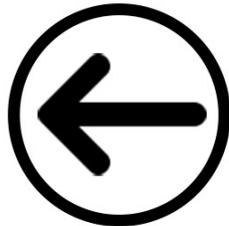
A light bulb should be something that “shines” from the passage — something new or fresh. *What stuck out to you this time through?* Every time we read the Bible, God will be reminding us of things we’ve forgotten and showing us things we haven’t seen before.

And when we read the Bible in a group, he’ll be revealing different things to different people, multiplying the insight and learning. God does not intend for us to see different *meanings*, but to learn the one true multi-dimensional meaning, and then to see some of the limitless implications and applications from that truth.



A question mark: Anything that is difficult to understand in the text, or a question the reader would like to ask the writer of the passage or the Lord. Did these verses raise any questions as you read? You might stumble over a word or verse, or a connection to another part of the Bible, or a particular theological point.

With every question you ask, try and answer your own question before going to others for help. Some of the deepest, most lasting learning we do comes when we press ourselves to search the Bible for an answer to our own question. The answer might be in the verse we're studying, or in the surrounding chapter or book, or God may bring to mind a verse or verses elsewhere in the Bible. Stop, pray, ask, and do your best. *Then*, turn to others (whether commentaries or other members of your group) for another perspective.



An arrow indicates a personal application for our lives. Identify and commit to something you sense the Spirit is leading you to do in obedience to this text. Make it specific enough that you can do it this week and make it personal enough that you yourself can do it (and not someone else).

A lot of Bible study, both privately and in a group, falls short of applying the text to our personal lives. One of the great things about studying the Bible in a group is that there's built-in accountability. If you talk out loud with others through steps to take toward greater obedience, you have other people around you to follow up and ask you how those particular things are going.

Arrow (Example): When I do my personal Bible reading, I am going to regularly ask if God might be 1) teaching me something, 2) telling me to stop doing something I am doing, 3)

correcting some wrong thinking or behavior, or 4) preparing me to live more effectively for him.

Closing

Remind the group of the Project 15:25 mission partner for the week and ways they can help. Perhaps your COB as a whole wants to join together to support the ministry.

Check in if you haven't already done so and ask for any prayer requests. Encourage group members to write down these requests and follow up as necessary. Close with prayer.