

Genesis Chapters 39-40 Summary - John Karmelich

I'm guessing most of us know the feeling of, "Everything's falling apart and there is no solution". Now imagine being a 17-year-old, who was sold into slavery against his will, then he was falsely accused of raping his master's wife and thrown into prison. This boy, a believer in God, had the gift of interpreting significant dreams correctly. He correctly interpreted a dream of a fellow prisoner. That guy got out of prison, but he didn't tell his boss about Joseph (the 17-year-old, maybe older at this point). If you think you got problems, despite your trust in God, imagine going through all that. I know most of us are very familiar with this story, but having perspective is essential when dealing with problems in life!

I'm also very aware of devout Christians who died in horrible pain so there's no guarantee of getting an outcome that is favorable in this lifetime. One of the greatest things I ever learned is that the one thing we can control is our attitude. (That was written by a man who survived a Nazi concentration camp!) I am just saying rotten things happen to most people in life. We can choose to be miserable or choose to make the best of the situation. Believe it or not, that leads me back to Joseph. Despite all he dealt with, he chose to make the best of every situation. Don't get me wrong: I'm sure he argued when he got taken to be a slave. The text says he fought the situation when he was falsely accused of attacking the wife of his slave owner! When he correctly interpreted the dreams of those in prison with him, he asked that he be remembered by the big boss, and that didn't help. Joseph didn't just "take it" but he also accepted it's not God's will for the situation to change. If we learn anything from Joseph at this point, it's about trust in God through whatever we're dealing with! It's about having faith that God is working out our life for His glory despite whatever we're dealing with! OK enough of "the obvious", time for the details:

Let's start by recalling that Chapter 38 is in effect an interruption of the story of Joseph to tell the story of his half brother Judah. That story is important as the Messiah comes through Judah, and God wants to show us that despite the sins in the line of the Messiah, God's will, will be done. In fact, the last line of Chapter 37 ties well to the first line of Chapter 39. In effect it starts with a few things about the man who bought Joseph as a slave. He was a top Egyptian military official, in charge of many soldiers. He had enough wealth to buy a slave. He wanted one to help run his home as his job required a lot of time. One thing to realize that while God spoke directly to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (father, son, grandson) God never spoke directly to Joseph (that was recorded) who more is said about him than the other three key characters here in Genesis who came before him!

A key point is Joseph was a good witness for God and the text said He blessed him because he became a good witness to his master. It got to a point where the master (Potiphar) let Joseph be in charge of all things except what Potiphar ate! Then the plot thickens: The text says Joseph was handsome. Keep in mind his father loved his mother because she was good looking! Then we read Potiphar's wife came on to him! I don't know if she was bored or jealous of the fact her husband was constantly away or just the fact Joseph got to run the household! She tried to force Joseph to have sex with her. Praise God Joseph did what was right and ignored her advances. Joseph as a slave could be killed for attacking his wife.

When she failed to seduce him, then she tried telling everyone there that Joseph tried to rape her. That is a death penalty for a slave to do that! When Potiphar found out, he was angry and suspected his wife was lying because he knew it wasn't part of Joseph's nature to do that! Still Potiphar had a dilemma as he couldn't let Joseph hang around the house after that accusation, so even though it was a false charge, it meant prison for Joseph. Remember he was a slave, so he had no rights!

While I'm sure Joseph made his case, he still accepted the situation. After going to prison the man who ran the place, also saw Joseph's positive attitude and eventually he was running the place just as he was running Potiphar's house. I remember a long time ago seeing a movie about this and the one thing that I recall from the movie was how the jail keeper called Joseph, "the freest man I ever met" as he didn't let the bad situations bother him, but he trusted in God and made the best of every situation! As I stated in my introduction, the one thing other people can't control is our attitude! Just as Potiphar let Joseph run his household partially due to his positive attitude, so the jail keeper let Joseph "run the place".

That leads us to Chapter 41: Two of Joseph's fellow prisoners were the two top "food preparation" men who served the Pharaoh of Egypt. Keep in mind kings are always worried about being killed, so if men who prepared and tasted his food, they're usually in earshot of a king, when he's hungry or thirsty. For both to be in prison probably means (my guess) is the king felt like someone tried to poison him and he was not sure who to blame, so the wine steward and top food preparer were in prison at that moment.

Then of all things, we get stories about dreams. We haven't had that since Joseph was a boy and stated two big ones to his family in effect, that he'd be in charge one day! That turn of event will occur in the next chapter! In ancient middle east cultures, dreams were a big deal. Religious leaders of cults would have whole manuals on dream interpretations. With the head food guy and head wine guy locked up in prison, there were no professional interpreters in the neighborhood! Joseph saw that both of them were pondering what each of their dreams meant and asked in effect, "what's the problem guys?" Since there was no one else to talk to the wine guy went first and told his dream to Joseph. He made the statement that interpretations are God's business. Since these guys knew religious people dealt with that, it made them feel comfortable talking to Joseph about their dreams, plus they had nothing better to do!

The wine guy (to make it simple) said his dream involved a grape vine with three branches. Grapes do grow from the branches. The wine guy squeezed wine in the Pharaoh's cup and that was the end of the dream. Joseph said, the three branches are three days. Then he said, in three days Pharaoh will release the wine steward from prison as he was innocent. Before getting to the baker's dream, Joseph then gave a "commercial" about his story about wrongly being in prison. Joseph figured since this will come true then the wine guy could tell the story to the Pharaoh and maybe get him released. A point of the story's that the wine guy was so excited to be out of prison, he never mentioned Joseph and went on with what he was called to do, be the wine taster for his boss.

Meanwhile the guy in charge of baked goods probably thought, "That went well for my friend, so now I'll share my dream with Joseph!" This dream involved three baskets of bread (think baked goods), and the top basket was for the Pharaoh. Joseph said in three days the king will chop off your head as you've been found guilty of "poisoned food". I picture the baker saying, "Gee, thanks a lot fella!"

Three days later happened to be the Pharaoh's birthday. Since he was in a party mood, he decided that it was time to deal with both men in prison, and let's just say it happened exactly as Joseph said. In the first verse of the next chapter, we read two full years past before God dealt with Joseph again. Plus, we don't know how long he was in prison to begin with

OK John, good story and most of us have known it since childhood. What's your point? It isn't to learn ancient history. It is to remember that all of us in life get into situations that may or may not have been our fault. Sometimes the bottom just falls out of our life, and we must make the best decisions possible in spite of the situation we wish we were not in. At moments like that, we must remember God's still in charge, still running the show despite any direct revelation what to do next. As always, we must still be a good witness for Him, as He's in charge of our lives, not us!

On the same page as this study is a more detailed study I wrote many years back. You are welcome to email me if you want or join my list to the get the latest lesson. Thanks for reading. John