

Multi-Colored Grace, Part 6: From Prisoner to Palace Ruler (Gen 41)

Waiting is one of the hardest things for many modern Americans. Little kids can't wait to get where they're going in a car as they ask: "are we there yet?" Men sometimes wait for the women in their families in the car before they leave, or in the store while they're shopping. I've made my wife wait for me in ways frustrating to her. I confess I struggle with impatience as a parent more than anything else. Waiting patiently isn't natural for me. We live in a fast-paced fast-food world. Many consider having to wait in the drive-thru a few minutes as unacceptable. Having to drive at or under the speed limit is seen as inconvenient, and having to deal with slow internet speeds is seen as downright unbearable. We send text messages and if someone doesn't reply in a short amount of time, it's an almost unfathomable personal offense to us

At the end of Genesis 40, where we'll pick up with our study today, Joseph isn't just waiting for superficial things we get impatient about, he's waiting on what may be death row (it was for the baker). He's not waiting minutes for a text message reply, but years for an answer to prayer. 11 years went by since God revealed to Joseph in 2 dreams that he'd have a high position of authority over others, but he's at the lowest position possible in a pit. Have you ever felt low, trapped, forgotten like no one cares? Ever wonder if God cares or hears your prayers? As I said last week I've been there. I hope you know I care. If you've felt let down by man or God, Gen 41 shows His care

[leaders, churches will fall short in their love, but God doesn't]

Hudson Taylor had high dreams for China as a missionary but he ended up in 1860 far away from that land like Joseph was from where his heart was, and incapacitated as he waited. As one writes: 'After six years of intensive service in China, he returned home as an invalid and settled with his little family in the poor east end of London. There his outside interests faded, friends began to forget, and five long years were spent in coal-blackened streets in London. But from those years he writes: "Yet without those hidden years, with all their growth and testing, how could the vision and enthusiasm of youth have been matured for the leadership that was to be?" And as modern history attests, when the delay ended, the great China Inland Mission emerged.'¹ [mission saw 18,000+ converts, founded 125 schools]

After the delay in Joseph's life, we'll also see many saved in a foreign land. But not yet. First 2 men with 2 dreams show up in Gen 40. God reveals the interpretation. Joseph asks for help out. 2 more years later he's still waiting and maybe wondering what God's providence is doing as he goes to bed that night. As he sleeps, another man has the first of 2 more dreams of the future

Gen 41:1 Now it happened at the end of two full years that Pharaoh had a dream, and behold, he was standing by the Nile. ² And lo, from the Nile there came up seven cows, sleek and fat; and they grazed in the marsh grass. ³ Then behold, seven other cows came up after them from the Nile, ugly and gaunt, and they stood by the other cows on the bank of the Nile. ⁴ The ugly and gaunt cows ate up the seven sleek and fat cows. Then Pharaoh awoke. ⁵ He fell asleep and dreamed a second time; and behold, seven ears of grain came up on a single stalk, plump and good. ⁶ Then behold, seven ears, thin and scorched by the east wind, sprouted up after them. ⁷ The thin ears swallowed up the seven plump and full ears. Then Pharaoh awoke, and behold, it was a dream. ⁸ Now in the morning his spirit was troubled, so he sent and called for all the magicians of Egypt, and all its wise men. And Pharaoh told them his dreams, but there was no one who could interpret them to Pharaoh. ⁹ Then the chief cupbearer spoke to Pharaoh, saying, "I would make mention today of my own offenses. ¹⁰ "Pharaoh was furious with his servants, and he put me in confinement in the house of the captain of the bodyguard, both me and the chief baker. ¹¹ "We had a dream on the same night, he and I; each of us dreamed according to the interpretation of his own dream. ¹² "Now a Hebrew youth was with us there, a servant of the captain of the bodyguard, and we related them to him, and he interpreted our dreams for us. To each one he interpreted according to his own dream. ¹³ "And just as he interpreted for us, so it happened; he restored me in my office, but he hanged him." ¹⁴ Then Pharaoh sent and called for Joseph, and they hurriedly brought him out of the dungeon; and when he had shaved himself and changed his clothes, he came to Pharaoh. ¹⁵ Pharaoh said to Joseph, "I have had a dream, but no one can interpret it; and I have heard it said about you, that when you hear a dream you can interpret it." ¹⁶ Joseph then answered Pharaoh, saying, "**It is not in me; God will ...**"

Stop there for a moment and I want us to notice 3 big realities in this story:

A Big God

A Big Blessing

A Big Challenge (application: knowing the first 2 helps us with #3)

For big challenges no small non-sovereign God will do. But the God Joseph knew was plenty big enough. Notice his focus on God in v.16: *it's not in me, it's not about me, but God...* Joseph deflects Pharaoh's attention from him to God. And we need to pay attention to what he says as he draws attention to God and gives all the credit and glory to God alone. Our kids sing "my God is so BIG, so strong and so mighty, there's nothing my God cannot do. The mountains are His, the valleys are His, the stars are His handiwork, too."

Not every older person or parent or grown-up who goes to church, though, thinks in those terms. Sometimes challenges seem so big, temptations seem so strong, and trials seem so mighty, we think ‘what will *I* do?’ But Joseph has a big God, and he says in v. 16 it's not in me, it's about what God will do. He had a God so big, bigger than what was done to him by his brothers, the slave-traders, Potiphar's wife, prison, and bigger than an Egyptian king.

Egypt's kingdom covered several modern African countries, it was a world super-power. Joseph is before the most powerful ruler of their world, a man who believed he was a god himself. But Joseph instantly tells him about the true God whose kingdom is far bigger and who is far more powerful. In fact Pharaoh confessed his inability in v. 15, along with his false religion leaders who can't interpret his dream. *Pharaoh's no god, but Joseph knows God*. He isn't fazed by Pharaoh's oval office, he wants to talk about the throne room of heaven which is actually in sovereign control and determines the future.

[Joseph is a God-fearing witness]

Joseph feared God, not man. First word out of his mouth in Hebrew is "not me," and the second word out of his mouth is "God." Kent Hughes writes: 'he told Pharaoh (who himself was considered to be a god incarnate) that God (*ha Elohim*, "the God") would explain his dream. Thus, to Pharaoh's face Joseph asserted that [The] God was superior to and sovereign over the [supposed] gods of Egypt ... Joseph's speech was the same here as it was to the prisoners in the pit ... Joseph had not changed one whit in his trip from the prison to the palace ... [and Egypt's king stoops for help from a Hebrew slave in v. 17-24. He retells his dream and confesses his] alarm ... when the flesh-eating cows cannibalized the fat cows, Pharaoh noted, "they were still as ugly as at the beginning" (v. 21b) - still horribly skeletal ... what alarmed [Pharaoh most] was that there was no one who could explain the dreams to him ... the documenting of Pharaoh's helplessness and fear emphasizes "the mortality and finiteness of the dreamer ..." Pharaoh was a mere man. The God of Israel, the one and only true God, was rising high over the Nile.'²

v. 16 in one translation brings out the contrast of our inability but for God: *"I cannot do it...but God will..."* Joseph says ‘I'm unable, but God is able.’ After v. 17-24, notice Joseph's God-centered words in response in v. 25: *Joseph said to Pharaoh, "Pharaoh's dreams are one and the same; **God** has told to Pharaoh what **He [God]** is about to do."²⁶ *"The seven good cows are seven years; and the seven good ears are seven years; the dreams are one and the same."²⁷ *"The seven lean and ugly cows that came up after them are seven years, and the seven thin ears scorched by the east wind will***

be seven years of famine.²⁸ “It is as I have spoken to Pharaoh: **God has shown to Pharaoh what He is about to do** [these are God-centered words]

[v. 32] “Now as for the repeating of the dream to Pharaoh twice, it means that **the matter is determined by God, and God will quickly bring it about.** The unspoken implication: God’s sovereign, not you, Pharaoh. His decrees will determine the future of your kingdom not you. You think the Nile is the source of life, but God actually is. With all due respect, He's God, you're not

Application: What does it mean to have a big God? How do you know if you do? In Gen 41 it shows up in God-fearing witness, God-centered words. Also in Gen 39 to Potiphar's wife: "how can I do this and sin against *God*?" Or in Gen 40 to prisoners: "interpretations belong to *God*." Every time he's talking with unbelievers, God is on his heart and on his lips. When I fear or fail to talk of God to the unsaved (who can't do anything to me like Potiphar and Pharaoh could to Joseph), my fear of God is often small and my fear of man is too big. If we have a big God on our heart, though, it will affect how we speak and think, and what we think about what others think of us. Their approval of us or what they think of us can be eclipsed by a greater reality. The bigger God is to us, the smaller people and our problems will become.

How can we increase our view of God? Verses to write down and read later: Isa. 40-48, Job 38-42, Ps. 8, 145, etc. Books I recommend on the note sheet: *When People Are Big And God Is Small*, by Ed Welch (on fear of man), or *Pleasing People: How Not To Be An "Approval Junkie"*, by Lou Priolo. Those are both by biblical counseling movement leaders. General resources: A.W. Pink on *The Sovereignty of God*, or *The Attributes of God*. Or for free resources listen to the attributes of God series we did back in 2007. As John the Baptist said '*He must increase, I must decrease.*' May God increase to us

If I can share a personal illustration, I haven't gone through what Joseph has gone through, but when our young son Mark Joseph died, we struggled with the same questions as his probably, questions you probably have or will, too Why? Why put adoption on our heart and then take our adopted son away? Why give me a heart for something, then break it? I can't see what you're doing, God, it doesn't make sense? ... Ever been there? Life punches you in the gut, you wonder 'what in the world?' What was that for? Why me, why now? In those times we need a big God to hold on to as Cowper's song says 'behind a frowning providence' we can't 'judge the Lord by feeble sense, but trust Him for His grace.' We must trust our big sovereign God for grace.

As my wife and I grieved the loss of Mark Joseph, someone sent us a song about the Joseph in the Bible we named him after. It comes from the movie *Joseph* (Dreamworks) and imagines his thoughts in 40:23 (forgotten in jail)

I thought I did what's right [Potiphar's wife], I thought I had the answers
 I thought I chose the surest road [purity], But that road brought me here
 So I put up a fight, And told You [God] how to help me
 Now just when I have given up, The truth is coming clear
Chorus: You know better than I, You know the way
I've let go the need to know why, For You know better than I
 [you can find the song on youtube under "you know better than I"]

[2nd stanza] If this has been a test, I cannot see the reason
 But maybe knowing I don't know is part of getting through
 I tried to do what's best, But faith has made it easy
 To see the best thing I can do Is to put my trust in You.

God way's are bigger and higher than ours as high as the heavens over earth. This is where studying and knowing His attributes is so important for when those times come, to help us turn from why questions to the who - God and what we know about Him. He's good and knows better than I (end of Job). His timing and wisdom is superior to the wisest on earth, Gen 41 reminds us

Joseph had a big God as seen in a God-fearing witness, God-centered words ... the third way we see Joseph's big God here is in his God-given wisdom:
³⁴ *"Let Pharaoh take action to appoint overseers in charge of the land, and let him exact a fifth of the produce of the land of Egypt in the seven years of abundance.* ³⁵ *"Then let them gather all the food of these good years that are coming, and store up the grain for food in the cities under Pharaoh's authority, and let them guard it.* ³⁶ *"Let the food become as a reserve for the land for the seven years of famine which will occur in the land of Egypt, so that the land will not perish during the famine."* ³⁷ *Now the proposal seemed good to Pharaoh and to all his servants. [Pharaoh sees the wisdom] In v. 38 he sees and says no man in their region or religion has this insight, Joseph has "the spirit of God."* ³⁹ *So Pharaoh said to Joseph, "Since **God** has informed you of all this, there is no one so discerning and wise as you...*

Even the pagan king recognizes Joseph's God has given him this wisdom. All the king's horses and all the king's men can't, but God's spirit is in this Hebrew slave, showing him Egypt's economy will have a big fall in 7 years and how to put it back together again. A wise leader is need in a boom and

bust cycle, someone with foresight to not keep spending what Egypt didn't have but to store up for the future, not to exceed their resources but to save up to have resources on hand for the future. Does the Bible have anything to say about government, taxes and saving? Yes. God instituted government in its basic form in Genesis 9 and here He reveals governmental taxation and savings, and blesses these plans. In this case it was a 20% agricultural tax applied equally to rich and poor to be stored up to help citizens when their economy crashes in the 7-year famine. God's wisdom speaks to all realms.

A big God helped Joseph see the big picture (we need men like him today), and this is part of His bigger plan to keep Israel (and millions) from dying out. So this takes us to our 2nd big reality in this story: **A Big Blessing**

I get the wording of big blessing from Cowper's hymn: 'the clouds you so much dread are big with mercy and will break with blessings on your head.' Joseph started that day under a dark cloud, but big blessings now rain down. It couldn't get any bigger than what Pharaoh says to Joseph here in v. 40:

⁴⁰ *"You shall be over my house, and according to your command all my people shall do homage; only in the throne I will be greater than you."*

⁴¹ *Pharaoh said to Joseph, "See, I have set you over all the land of Egypt."*

James Boice calls this 'promotion...a culmination of a rise from slavery to greatness...perhaps unparalleled in the long history of the human race.'³ He had been demoted to the lowest place, but he's promoted to the highest one. Joseph's day started in a cell and ends with him as Supreme Vizier (term for Egypt's ruler). He's literally gone from a pit to the palace. In minutes he's gone from slavery to royalty, from prisoner to the Prime Minister of Egypt.

Can you think of another person in the OT who is in a similar situation? In a foreign land, a captive, interpreting a vision of a world ruler that none of his wise men could, and the pagan king recognizes his wisdom and he promotes him to a highest position? Who's the other OT character I'm talking about? Daniel. Dan 5:8 (NKJV) *'all the king's wise men came, but they could not ... make known to the king its interpretation.* [then one close to the king says in Dan 5:11] *There is a man in your kingdom in whom is the Spirit of the Holy God ... and wisdom ... understanding, interpreting dreams let Daniel be called, and he will give the interpretation."* *Then Daniel was brought in before the king.* [listen to some of Daniel's God-centered words like Joseph] ...¹⁸ *O king, **the Most High God** gave...*[he also starts with God like Gen 41]

...²¹ ... **the Most High God rules in the kingdom of men, and appoints over it whomever He chooses** ...²⁶ ... **God has numbered your kingdom** ...²⁹
Then Belshazzar gave the command, and they clothed Daniel with purple and put a chain of gold around his neck, and made a proclamation concerning him that he should be the third ruler in the kingdom.

Daniel was also taken as a youth against his will from the Promised Land, but when in Babylon he didn't do as Babylonians (like Joseph in Egypt). In both cases the Hebrew captive has wisdom the pagan wise men don't have, and both use the occasion to show how big and sovereign the true God is. And both are promoted to the highest available position in their kingdoms, clothed in royal-colored garments, kingly gold, with public proclamations.

⁴² *Then Pharaoh took off his signet ring from his hand and put it on Joseph's hand, and clothed him in garments of fine linen and put **the** gold necklace around his neck.* ⁴³ *He had him ride in his second chariot [you've heard of Air Force One, this is Ground Force Two]; and they proclaimed before him, "Bow the knee!" And he set him over all the land of Egypt.*

This is like Mordecai in the book of Esther, another lowly Hebrew elevated and paraded through streets of Persia in special clothes with high honors. In v. 44: *Pharaoh said to Joseph, "Though I am Pharaoh, yet without your permission no one shall raise his hand or foot in all the land of Egypt."* [In other words, under you, Egyptians will live, move and have their being] ⁴⁵ *Then Pharaoh named Joseph Zaphenath-paneah [exalted divine name]...*

This was beyond Joseph's wildest dreams. Growing up, his brothers thought Joseph's dreams were pretty wild about them bowing to him! Now everyone in the greatest kingdom of Africa is bowing to Joseph! He wore a collar of iron on his neck in prison (Ps 105:18 ESV), but now he wears on his neck the gold collar of a ruler. The chains that once bound his hands are replaced with the king's ring and seal. In a day he goes from rags to the richest robes. But his big blessing was for others, too. In v. 47-49 he does his 7-year plan. The big blessing is stored up for famine. v. 55 *So when all the land of Egypt was famished, the people cried out to Pharaoh for bread; and Pharaoh said to all the Egyptians, "Go to Joseph; whatever he says to you, you shall do."* ⁵⁶ *When the famine was spread over all the face of the earth, then Joseph opened all the storehouses, and sold to the Egyptians; and the famine was severe in the land of Egypt.* ⁵⁷ **The people of all the earth came to Egypt to buy grain from Joseph, because the famine was severe in all the earth.**

God blesses people so they can bless others (Ps 67). Joseph's blessing was a blessing to the nations (Gen 12:3), saving millions. Joseph's big blessing reminds us of Daniel, Mordecai, and Christ to come, Savior of all nations. God the Son was imprisoned in human flesh, in the humblest lowest place. Philippians 2:7 (HCSB) "*He emptied Himself by assuming the form of a slave...[but v. 9] **God highly exalted Him and gave Him the name that is above every name,** ¹⁰ so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow ..."*

[like we sang earlier 'Jesus Messiah, name above all names...Lord of all']

Hebrews 11 talks about Joseph and other great men of the OT but then the point it's building to in 12:2 is *fixing our eyes on Jesus* [not Joseph, Jesus who] *has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider Him*

...

We're not just to consider Joseph or fix our eyes on heroes of the faith from OT stories, we're to focus on the author of their faith, Jesus, Hero of heroes. When Gen 41:40 calls for honor/homage to Joseph, it's the same word used of the Messiah in Ps 2:12: "*give homage to the Son,*" literally *kiss the Son*. The OT itself uses similar language to Gen 41 of the Messiah to come, and so does the NT. v. 46 says Joseph was 30 years old as he took on his role as prime minister. The NT says Jesus was 30 years old as He began His role and ministry, another parallel *The MacArthur Study Bible* chart on a type of Christ brings out. Messiah's forerunner also called people to make way. In Christ we live and move, and have our being. Christ rules the whole world. Like Joseph earlier in this chapter, He wasn't intimidated as He stood before kings like Herod (or was it actually the earthly king standing before Jesus?)

F.B. Meyer says as Joseph 'was raised to supreme power in a gentile state, and saved myriads of them from death...[physically, so]Jesus...exalted to the supreme seat of power is now enthroned in the hearts of myriads of Gentiles to whom he has brought salvation...think of Jesus as seated on his throne, prime minister of the universe...interpreter of his Father's will..executor of the divine decrees. On his head are many crowns; on his finger the ring of sovereignty...And this is the cry which precedes him, "Bow the knee!"⁴

If you never have, bow in faith to Jesus as Lord. Like they cried out in v. 55 to their king for bread, cry out to your King Jesus as the bread of life to save you. And like v. 55 says, you must go to Him willing to obey whatever He says. Jesus calls all who are hungry to come, and He gives freely at no cost. And like in v. 42, the King gives us robes of fine linen to wear (Rev 19:14). The storehouses of heaven's blessing are open to refugees who beg for grace

In a bigger way than Joseph knew in Egypt, a big God has big blessings for us in Christ. But for Joseph there's a 3rd and final reality: **A Big Challenge**

I don't want us to miss what is easy to miss here. In applying Joseph's story to our lives, we need to see with his big blessing is a big challenge for him. Look at v. 45 more closely: *Pharaoh named Joseph Zaphenath-paneah; and he gave him Asenath, the daughter of Potiphera priest of On, as his wife.*

It's interesting to notice parallels with Jesus and Daniel, but this is one that many miss the significance of. Daniel is also given a new name by a pagan king, *Beltshazzar*, also having to do with the god understood by the pagan king. Same with Shadrach, Meshach, Abednego - why did their pagan king give Hebrews in his service new names that had to do with the king's God? It was a religious re-programming, part of trying to change their nature and identity as converts, no longer who they once were. The true God renamed Abram to Abraham and Jacob to Israel in Genesis, now Pharaoh is trying it. And in context the last time a Hebrew had an Egyptian concubine was bad (Hagar). Joseph is given the daughter of the highest pagan priest in Egypt.

[Asenath meant 'she belongs to the goddess Neit']

We need to understand in v. 14 when they shave and clean Joseph up, it's to make him look Egyptian. They want to sanitize him and Egyptianize him, to paganize him by his name and family being top guns of their pagan religion. Voddie Baucham calls Gen 41 'one of the most pivotal chapters in the entire Bible [and] one of the most misinterpreted chapters in the Bible...' "American Cinema" interpretation [of this]...*appears* to fit perfectly into a typical feel-good after-school special ... the big payoff we've been waiting for ... fame, fortune, and family ... "Boys and girls, remember this the next time people mistreat you." But is that correct? Does that interpretation fit the context...? I think not...If we take off our Hollywood lenses [this] is *not* the big payoff⁵

The big challenge/temptation is to renounce his upbringing and be a pagan. A similar big challenge/temptation will be faced by you young people here when you're away from home, as our world tries to reprogram you as pagan. Kent Hughes explains better than I can this 'danger of Egyptianization. His clothing was Egyptian, his name was Egyptian, his language was Egyptian, his wife was Egyptian, and his father-in-law was the leading Egyptian sun-worshiper...Joseph began married life listening to hymns sung to [sun-god] Re at the morning sunrise - in his own home. Joseph's soul was in greater danger than at any other time in his short life. It is one thing to remain ... faithful in the pit; it is quite another to be faithful at the pinnacle...'⁶

Now that he has power will he get back at Potiphar's wife? Or his brothers? How did Joseph do in resisting Egyptian assimilation or paganization? You have to come back for the rest of the story, which has much to say to us in our world. But we get a hint of it in v. 50-52, maybe the chapter's key verses

⁵⁰ *Now before the year of famine came, two sons were born to Joseph, whom Asenath, the daughter of Potiphara priest of On, bore to him.*

⁵¹ *Joseph named the firstborn Manasseh, "For," he said, "God has made me forget all my trouble and all my father's household."* ⁵² *He named the second Ephraim, "For," he said, "God has made me fruitful in the land of my affliction."* [not Egyptian, but Hebrew names about God's sovereignty]

v. 51-52 may be two of the most important verses in Joseph's story and we will see more of the significance in future weeks. These 2 boys become key names in Israel's history and redemptive history and pictures of God's grace to Gentiles. As a homework assignment, I'd encourage you to read the rest of Joseph's story (just 8 more chapters) in light of what these 2 verses say and see if you can see how v. 51-52 is so pivotal to the rest of the story.

Moses who wrote this chapter, also renounced his Egyptian identity and declaring allegiance to God not Pharaoh's house. And we must say in a similar way, 'I'd rather have Jesus than anything this world affords today.'

¹ Kent Hughes, *Genesis*, p. 473.

² *Ibid.*, 479.

³ James Boice, *Genesis*, 3:970.

⁴ F.B. Meyer, *Joseph: Beloved-Hated-Exalted*, p. 63-64.

⁵ Voddie Baucham, *Joseph and the Gospel of Many Colors: Reading an Old Story in a New Way*, p. 73, 78.

⁶ Hughes, p. 487.