

Genesis Lecture Series, Session 22: Joseph in Egypt (Genesis 39–41)

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Abstract

This lecture covers Genesis chapters 39 to 41, detailing Joseph's experience in Egypt as a slave and a prisoner, and his eventual rise to second in command under Pharaoh. Dr. Mathews highlights the theological contrast between the moral decay of Judah and the moral integrity of Joseph, emphasizing that the Lord's presence and favor accompanied Joseph through every trial. The session explores key motifs, including the theological significance of double dreams, symbolic changes in clothing, and the pattern of descent followed by divine exaltation. Joseph's preservation of both Egypt and the surrounding nations from famine is ultimately presented as a typological prefiguration of Jesus Christ as the Savior of the world.

Outline

I. Introduction and Narrative Context

- A. Overview of Genesis 39–41: Joseph's life and sojourn in Egypt
- B. Connection to Genesis 37: Joseph kidnapped by his brothers and sold into slavery
- C. Theological Framework: Fulfillment of the Genesis 15:13 covenant vision (prophecy of 400 years of foreign slavery)

II. Comparative Character Studies: Judah vs. Joseph

- A. Judah and Tamar (Genesis 38)
 - 1. Judah's moral decline, Canaanite marriage, and family tragedies
 - 2. Tamar's deception to secure children after being withheld from Judah's third son
 - 3. Judah's acknowledgment of Tamar's greater righteousness
- B. Joseph's Moral Integrity in Potiphar's House (Genesis 39)
 - 1. Seduction attempts by Potiphar's wife and Joseph's repeated refusal
 - 2. Joseph's rationale: respect for his master and avoiding sin against God
 - 3. Joseph fleeing temptation (comparisons to Proverbs 5, 1 Corinthians 6, and 2 Timothy 2:22)
 - 4. False accusations of rape by Potiphar's wife and Joseph's imprisonment

III. Key Theological Themes and Motifs in Joseph's Story

- A. The Divine Presence and Favor ("The Lord was with Joseph")
 - 1. God's blessing in Potiphar's house as a fulfillment of Abrahamic promises
 - 2. Divine favor and success in prison

3. Historical parallels of divine blessing on Abraham's offspring (Abimelech, Laban)

B. The Motif of Descent and Reversal (Rising)

1. Progression of descent: cistern to slavery in Egypt, and finally to prison
2. Reversal and ascension: rising from the dungeon to the throne as second in command

C. The Motif of Clothing

1. Loss of the beautiful ornamented robe given by Jacob
2. Loss of the garment seized by Potiphar's wife
3. Transition from prison garments to royal linen robes

D. The Nature of Dream Interpretation

1. Attributed entirely to God's gifting rather than personal clairvoyance
2. Purpose of double (duo) dreams: confirming the divine authenticity and swift fulfillment of God's plans

IV. Joseph in Prison: The Dreams of Pharaoh's Officials (Genesis 40)

A. Imprisonment of Pharaoh's Chief Cupbearer and Chief Baker

B. The Chief Cupbearer's Dream of the Vine and Three Branches

1. Joseph's interpretation: restoration within three days ("lifting up your head")
2. Joseph's plea to be remembered to Pharaoh

C. The Chief Baker's Dream of Three Baskets and Birds

1. Joseph's interpretation: execution within three days ("lifting off your head")
2. Fulfillment of both dreams on Pharaoh's birthday

D. The Cupbearer's Forgetfulness and God's Faithfulness

V. Joseph's Elevation: Pharaoh's Dreams and Rise to Power (Genesis 41)

A. Pharaoh's Double Dreams

1. The seven sleek and fat cows consumed by seven ugly, gaunt cows
2. The seven healthy heads of grain swallowed by seven thin, scorched heads

B. Joseph's Interpretation and Administrative Strategy

1. The dreams foretell seven years of great abundance followed by seven years of severe famine
2. Proposal to appoint a wise man to store grain during the years of plenty

C. Promotion and Egyptian Acculturation of Joseph

1. Appointed second in command over Egypt
2. Invested with the signet ring, fine linen robes, and a gold chain
3. Name changed to Zaphenath-paneah (Egyptian name)
4. Marriage to Asenath, daughter of Potiphara, priest of On
5. Age transition: 30 years old (13 years since being sold at age 17)

VI. Famine, Fullness, and Universal Preservation

A. Storing of Grain and the Birth of Joseph's Sons

1. Manasseh: "forgetting" his troubles and father's house, showing risks of moral/cultural assimilation
2. Ephraim: "double fruitfulness" in the land of suffering

B. Open Storehouses and the Survival of Egypt and the Nations

C. Theological Conclusion: Joseph as the Savior of the World as a Typological Foreshadowing of Jesus Christ