

JANUARY 19

Genesis 39:1-41:16

There is nothing like adversity to focus you on the Lord. Now, adversity doesn't always have a positive effect on everyone, but to the right people, the kind of loneliness and hardship Joseph experienced brings them closer to God. I don't think Jacob responded well to adversity. He just fought back. But what happened to Joseph seems to have caused a positive change, as God engineered this hardship to shape him.

Genesis 39

V. 1 Joseph was bought and sold by "Midianites" who are referred to as Ishmaelites. Midian was one of Abraham's sons born to his wife, Keturah, after Sarah's death. (Gen. 25:1-4) In those 100+ years, the tribe had grown and mixed (as Esau did) with Ishmael's clan. As a nation, the Midianites will be a problem to Israel in a couple of important places. It might be that Jacob's sons regarded all of the other seven sons of Abraham, and their descendants, as Ishmaelites.

Vs. 2-10 It was apparent to Joseph and to Potiphar that the blessing was from God. Joseph didn't have to be grateful to God and allow that to determine his behavior and heart, but he did. Mixed with his pain and sorrow, God's blessing drew Joseph's heart to God. Jacob was blessed by God with Laban but didn't express his gratitude. Most people really don't. But Joseph was grateful. So when Potiphar's wife went for him, Joseph realized that he would ultimately be throwing away his relationship with God, not repaying God in kind for the mercy and blessing he had received.

These are great discipleship lessons, but they have to be lived. Without the hardship endured in following Christ in the harvest, most of us never learn to focus on God. Without the blessing of seeing Him use us in the harvest, most of us never truly appreciate our salvation and His grace and mercy to us.

Vs. 11-20 Joseph wasn't wearing much if she could pull off his robe and see that he was uncircumcised. I guess they dressed differently back then, like the Scots in kilts. Abraham and Isaac grew an enormous community in Canaan that had now dwelt there many years. You can figure it out from the text. If Abe was 75 when he entered Canaan and Isaac was born when Abe was 100 and Isaac lived to be 180, then this community had been a part of Canaan for over 200 years. This group was known to the nations and was a stop on the caravan routes. They were large and wealthy herders and Bedouin, known as Hebrews, living in tents. And they had this one particularity, the men were circumcised. Over the 200 years, the Egyptians, especially the merchants, had heard of the Hebrews. Remember too, we'll find out in a couple of chapters, that the Egyptians despised shepherds as crass, dirty, bottom dwellers. Now, with her anger and resentment focused on Joseph, she sees he is obviously a Hebrew. Yuk!

I once messed up in a Sunday school class, saying that Potiphar probably knew his wife was a flirt and had to save face and didn't want to do this to Joseph. The teacher wisely corrected me by pointing out, in the text, that it says that when Potiphar heard the story from his wife, *his anger was kindled*. Pot got hot, and Joe went to jail. Paul says we should study to be approved workmen. You've got to know the text before you teach and before you venture out on a limb. That embarrassment taught me a good lesson, and, as you can see, I still remember that magic moment of correction.

Vs. 21-23 Notice that even in the bitterness of being wrongfully accused, without appeal, God immediately began to give Joseph favor and to bless everything he touched. This was the Lord's confirmation and help to Joseph, but then, Joseph had to be in the right frame of heart to see this. Joe was still in prison. As disciples, we too have to be looking for where the Lord is working. He is always with us. We need to be alert, even when things don't "go our way." And in this, Joseph

is humbled again, and lifted up by God again. Guess where Joseph's hope and gratitude were being focused. Did you notice the reference to God's *steadfast love*?

How much time is passing in Joseph's life? There will be clues, and you've already been given a big one. You know how old Joseph was when his brothers sold him. These sorts of little details make you skilled in understanding and applying the story. I still shake my head when I see pictures of Daniel in the lion's den, depicted as a young man. It's what happens when you don't pay attention to the context or the text. No wonder few people know how important Daniel 6 is, and sadly, it is all there in the book. Disciples need to read with curiosity and pay attention to what God is saying.

The same applies here. We need to pay attention to the passage of time. Joseph wasn't "automatically" godly. God didn't change Joseph overnight, and He won't do it with us either. If you pay attention to the text, not only will you be blessed by God's wisdom, you won't preach or teach superficial baloney.

Genesis 40

V. 1 *Some time after this* is hard to understand now, but it will make sense tomorrow, unless you are really curious and figure it out today. And if you figure it out, figure out too, how old Joseph is when he reveals himself to his brothers. But one caution: If you go to some Bible study guide or search online and let someone else do the work for you, you'll miss the joy of discovery. Finding the answer someone else figured out doesn't do the same thing for your heart and growth as finding it yourself.

Vs. 2-22 I'm not sure if Joseph had understanding of all dreams, but the Spirit definitely nudged him here and showed Joe what these two dreams meant.

V. 23 This chapter is a bridge to what is to come. For us as disciples, it is important to see how God used this event to form Joseph. We can go to the next chapter in a second, but Joseph couldn't. Joseph was forgotten and never knew that the cupbearer would eventually remember. Amazing. All Joseph knows at this point, and for the next two years, is to live every day for God, to forget his family, and to forget that one weird moment when he interpreted those dreams, when it seemed that something might work out for him. In that daily life and disappointment, God was molding his heart for chapter 41.

Genesis 41:1-16

Vs. 1-8 Two years later. In tomorrow's reading you'll learn how old Joseph was when this happened, and therefore, how long he was captive in Egypt and even how old he was when he interpreted the dream of the cupbearer. And not just 2 years, but 2 whole years.

Vs. 9-13 The cupbearer finally made good on his promise.

Vs. 14-16 In case we think that Joseph had it good in jail as the assistant to the warden, notice what the jail was called. The pit!

Notice the work of God in Joseph's words. Obviously Joseph is a great man, but God made him that way. But who would want to go through what God led Joseph through? I think a disciple should be willing to enroll in that course, being pruned by the Father to bear more fruit in the harvest.

Matthew 12:46-13:23

Matthew 12:46-50

This section should have been placed with the text from yesterday.

Having heard that Jesus was "beside himself" and that He was possessed by the devil, the family freaked and came to get Him. The sword that Simeon said would pierce Mary's heart was

beginning to cut its way through, as she, herself, was beginning to doubt her son and all the events around His birth. Among the brothers were probably James and Jude, both writers of letters in the New Testament. I always imagine that the plan was that Mary should distract Jesus. Then two of the brothers would come in high and put the grain sack over Jesus' head and around his arms, and then the other two would come in low with the ropes. Once tied, they would carry Jesus home like a sack of potatoes.

Anyway, Jesus was not falling for this one; in fact, Jesus is absolutely focused. He points to His disciples and (quoting Luke) gives the simple message of discipleship, *But He answered and said to them, "My mother and My brothers are these who hear the word of God and do it."* (Luke 8:21) Amen.

Matthew 13:1-23

What I think is important for us as disciples, in this section, is the emphasis on "wanting to hear and understand." This is very much the same as *seek and you will find*, etc.

Vs. 1-2 Jesus was out there a long time teaching and told several parables. Matthew is keeping the parables and their explanations together.

Vs. 3-9 Have fun!

Vs. 10-17 If you put the other gospels together, when they get in the house the disciples ask Jesus two questions. They wanted to know what this parable meant, and then they wanted to know why Jesus spoke to the people in this fashion, using parables.

Jesus told parables, not to hide the truth, but to reveal who was interested in understanding. It was a test of the hearts of the people. The promises to those who "ask and seek and knock" are absolute. The faith promise here for the disciple (that is, it is only a promise if you believe it and do it) is that the more you give Him in seeking to understand (time in the Bible, praying, doing), the more you will get back. This will, itself, be a motivation for some people; yet others will just say, "Whatever, I'm good with what I've got."

V. 14 The prophecy in Isaiah is a judgment saying the people didn't want to understand. If they really wanted to understand, there was enough that was clear that they could strain a little with the result of turning to God and being healed and saved. When we read the parable, it doesn't seem all that hard. But the tendency for people is to hear what they desire and what fits their thinking. Most believers don't really pay attention to this parable.

Your observations here are more important than anything I have to say, but if you are interested, I made some entries dealing with this parable.

December 14, 2010 <http://fencerail.blogspot.com/2010/12/hearing-and-sharing-in-harvest-and-ch-2.html>

December 1, 2010 <http://fencerail.blogspot.com/2010/12/hearing-in-harvest.html>

Psalm 17

If you have never felt pursued, this might not do much for you. I used to speed read The Psalms, until I got "run over" in ministry. Now I can't read them fast. Don't they read like posts to God? And imagine the compassion and understanding of a God who would inspire them.

As you read this, remember that David was trained, like Joseph, through long years of hardship. Notice the references to God's steadfast love and to seeking refuge in Him.

Vs. 1-5 In 1 Samuel 24:5 you find one of the occasions when David showed his integrity by sparing the life of King Saul. David was tested, proven innocent and yet he was still in danger. He was still lied about by Saul and his men and they still pursued him. David is not only asking God to look on that, but he is also recognizing that God put him through that test.

Vs. 6-9 David's hope wasn't in the help of his men or opportune circumstances. He knew that God was watching over him in His *steadfast love*.

V. 8 I never understood the expression *apple of your eye* and how the English-speaking world misunderstands this, until I learned German. In German, the word for "eyeball" is, literally, "eye apple." Turned around, what is being said here is that God will protect us like any of us would protect our own eyeball. Not only do you cover your eye, but if anyone threatens to poke out your "eye apple," you tend to get angry and aggressive. We get this image of God having found a nice, juicy, ripe, red, shiny apple; and if you try to take a bite out of it, boy, will He get mad. No. The apple is an eye-apple, or for us English speakers, an eyeball.

When I read v. 8, I always think of Elizabeth Elliot's book, [The Shadow of the Almighty](#).

Vs. 10-12 This is how David felt about the people who were pursuing him. It couldn't have been very pleasant.

Vs. 13-14 The second half of v. 14 seems confusing. I think the NIV has the right sense. *O LORD, by your hand save me from such men, from men of this world whose reward is in this life. You still the hunger of those you cherish; their sons have plenty, and they store up wealth for their children.* (Psalm 17:14)

V. 15 In spite of everything and regardless of what others did, David loved the Lord and was satisfied with and confident in His care. That's what made him a good leader and a man after God's own heart.

Proverbs 3:33-35

Don't these verses seem like what we've been reading about in Genesis, in the family of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob? In a way, you see the contrast between Jacob and Joseph. Both faced hardship, but one received humbling before God and drew close to Him.