

Genesis 37:1–41:57 – “Overcome Suffering’s Trials”

Text: Genesis 37:1–41:57 (CSB)

37:3–4 Now Israel loved Joseph more than his other sons because Joseph was a son born to him in his old age, and he made a long-sleeved robe for him. When his brothers saw that their father loved him more than all his brothers, they hated him and could not bring themselves to speak peaceably to him.

37:19–20 “Here comes that dreamer!” they said to each other. “Come on, let’s kill him and throw him into one of the pits. We can say that a vicious animal ate him. Then we’ll see what becomes of his dreams!”

39:2–3 The LORD was with Joseph, and he became a successful man, serving in the household of his Egyptian master. When his master saw that the LORD was with him and that the LORD made everything he did successful...

39:20–21 Joseph’s master took him and put him in prison, the place where the king’s prisoners were confined. And he was there in prison. But the LORD was with Joseph and extended kindness to him. He granted him favor with the prison warden.

41:39–40 Pharaoh then said to Joseph, “Since God has made all this known to you, there is no one as discerning and wise as you are. You will be over my house, and all my people will obey your commands. Only I, as king, will be greater than you.”

Key Background

- **The Cycle of Favoritism Continues:** Just as Isaac favored Esau and Rebekah favored Jacob, Israel (Jacob) now favors Joseph—the firstborn son of his beloved Rachel. The ornate robe is a public declaration of that preference. The family pattern continues, and so do its consequences. The sins of parents do not automatically pass to children, but they create environments in which the same wounds are inflicted on the next generation.
- **Joseph’s Dreams:** God gives Joseph two dreams in which his family will bow to him (37:5–11). Joseph shares them with his brothers and father—perhaps naively, perhaps arrogantly. His father rebukes him but keeps the matter in mind (37:11). The dreams are genuinely from God, but Joseph’s handling of them contributes to the growing hatred against him. God-given vision requires wisdom in its communication.
- **Betrayal by Brothers:** What begins with envy escalates to murder plots, then to the sale of Joseph as a slave to Ishmaelite traders (37:28). The brothers’ hatred is deep and long-nursed. Joseph is stripped of his robe—the sign of his father’s favor—thrown into a pit, and sold. At seventeen, the dreamer becomes the slave. Yet the text records no moment of bitterness or apostasy from Joseph.
- **The LORD Was with Joseph:** This phrase appears repeatedly and deliberately in Genesis 39 (vv. 2, 3, 21, 23). It is the theological heartbeat of Joseph’s story. Joseph is a slave—but God is with him. He is falsely accused—but God is with him. He is imprisoned—but God is with him. Divine presence does not remove suffering; it transforms its meaning and its fruit.

- **Potiphar's Wife:** Joseph's integrity is tested by Potiphar's wife's persistent advances. His refusal is grounded in loyalty to Potiphar and—crucially—in his fear of God: "How could I do this immense evil, and how could I sin against God?" (39:9). When she retaliates with false accusation, Joseph suffers for doing right. This is a pattern the New Testament calls suffering for righteousness' sake (1 Peter 2:20).
- **The Prison and the Promise:** In prison, Joseph is given authority by the warden—just as he was given authority by Potiphar. His gifts emerge in every environment. More importantly, he uses his gift of dream interpretation to serve the cupbearer and baker (Genesis 40), asking only that the cupbearer remember him—and the cupbearer forgets him for two full years (40:23). Joseph is left waiting, again.
- **Pharaoh's Dreams:** Two years later, Pharaoh has two disturbing dreams that none of his wise men can interpret. The cupbearer suddenly remembers Joseph (41:9–13)—not out of loyalty but self-interest. Even forgotten promises and self-serving remembrance can be instruments of God's timing. Joseph is brought before Pharaoh, interprets the dreams of seven years of plenty followed by seven years of famine, and is elevated to second in command over Egypt.
- **From the Pit to the Palace:** Joseph's rise from slave to second-in-command of Egypt is not presented as a rags-to-riches triumph but as the fulfillment of God's sovereign purpose. At thirty years old, Joseph is thirteen years removed from the pit. He did not manufacture this outcome; he was faithful in every environment, and God positioned him. His elevation is God's doing—Joseph is simply the vessel.

Questions from the Story

1. How does Genesis 37:3–4 introduce the core tension of Joseph's story? What familiar family pattern do you see repeating?
2. What are the two dreams God gives Joseph (37:5–11)? How do his brothers and father respond?
3. Was it wise for Joseph to share his dreams with his brothers? What does this question raise about the difference between having a God-given vision and knowing how to communicate it?
4. How does the brothers' hatred escalate from contempt to violence (37:18–28)? What do their words "Then we'll see what becomes of his dreams!" reveal about their intent?
5. What happens to Joseph's robe (37:23)? What does the stripping of the robe signify given what it represented?
6. How does Jacob respond when shown Joseph's bloodied robe (37:33–35)? What is the painful irony of this deception, given Jacob's own history?
7. What does the repeated phrase "The LORD was with Joseph" (39:2, 3, 21, 23) communicate about how God works in suffering?
8. How does Joseph respond to Potiphar's wife's advances (39:8–9)? What is the specific reason he gives for refusing?
9. What happens to Joseph after he does the right thing (39:19–20)? What does this teach us about suffering for righteousness?
10. How does Joseph behave in prison (39:21–23)? What does his consistent faithfulness in every environment reveal about his character?

11. Why does Joseph ask the cupbearer to remember him (40:14–15)? What does the cupbearer's forgetting (40:23) cost Joseph?
12. How long does Joseph wait in prison after interpreting the cupbearer's dream (41:1)? What might those two years of waiting have felt like?
13. How does Pharaoh's dream reach Joseph (41:9–13)? What is ironic about the cupbearer's sudden memory?
14. How does Joseph credit his ability to interpret dreams when brought before Pharaoh (41:16)? What does this reveal about his relationship with God?
15. What does Pharaoh recognize about Joseph when appointing him to his position (41:38–40)? What does a pagan king's recognition tell us about the visibility of God's presence in a life?
16. Joseph names his sons Manasseh and Ephraim (41:51–52)—“God has made me forget” and “God has made me fruitful.” What do these names reveal about how Joseph is processing his suffering?
17. How does this story as a whole challenge the idea that suffering means God is absent or uninvolved?
18. Where in your own experience have you seen God's presence and faithfulness in the middle of a situation that felt like abandonment?