

God Remembers the Forgotten

Genesis 40-41

Intro: Feeling Forgotten

Have you ever wondered whether God has forgotten you? You've been in a long season of waiting...years of unanswered prayers for healing, a spouse, a job, a child, for clarity. The silence seems deafening, and you interpret God's silence as his absence.

Maybe you've experienced unjust suffering: falsely accused by a friend, treated unfairly at work. Or you've felt repeated disappointment: one door after another closes, relationships keep ending, your efforts don't bear fruit.

You wonder: Has God forgotten me? Which doesn't mean: Has his memory of me literally faded? You're theology is too good to know God cannot literally forget. You're asking: Does he care? Does my suffering matter to him? Will he let the pain continue?

Chs 40-41 of Genesis proves *God remembers the forgotten* in three ways...

1) God remembers his people in the pit.

[40:1] We don't know how long Joseph has been in prison by this point. The author just says, "Sometime after this," meaning, "After he was put in prison wrongly by Potiphar." He could've been in prison for as much as ten years by this point.

Two men join him: the chief cupbearer and the chief baker of the king of Egypt. They committed some kind of offense against Pharaoh, showing, unlike Joseph, they deserve to be in prison. We don't know what they did, but their role required full trust from the king because if a king in ANE was going to be assassinated it was by poison in their drink or food. So these men in charge of the king's food and drink need his full trust, and apparently they broke that. **[vv2-3]**

They're awaiting their sentence and the prison they just so happen to land in is the same prison as Joseph. Coincidence? Makes you wonder if something significant is gonna happen. **[v4]** As they await their fate, something significant *does* happen. **[vv5-11]**

So picture a grape vine with three shoots, filled with ripe, juicy grapes. *I don't know if your family is like ours, but our kids devour a whole bag juicy plump grapes in seconds. They have crunch and burst of juice.*

What does the cupbearer's dream signify? *Fruitfulness*. Seems like something good... especially when he's squeezing the juice of the grapes into the king's cup, serving him once again. **[vv12-13]**

It was common in that day to bow in the king's presence. But when the king favors a person, he would call on them to lift of their head from bowing and approach him. So this "lifting of the head" is an idiom for showing favor. This is good news for the cupbearer.

As he is beaming with joy, Joseph makes one simple request. **[v14]** There's a lot going on in that statement. The word *remember* is the same word God uses again and again to talk about his intimate knowledge of and covenantal commitment to his people.

- 8:1, “God *remembered* Noah and all the beasts and all the livestock that were with him in the ark.”
- 9:15, “I will remember my covenant that is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh.”
- 19:29, “God remembered Abraham...”
- 30:22, “God remembered Rachel...and opened her womb.”

It’s a word that captures not only God’s covenantal commitment to his people in general, but specifically his covenantal commitment to them when they are suffering. It’s word in Exodus 2:24 when the people of Israel are suffering as slaves in Egypt, “God heard their groaning, and *remembered* his covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.”

It is a word that describes God’s personal, intimate knowledge *of* and commitment *to* his people, especially when it looks like he’s forgotten them. No doubt the people of Israel who read this story of Joseph would’ve resonated with his word here, “Do me the *kindness to mention* me to Pharaoh,” he says.

Kindness the same word used for God's steadfast/covenant love-keeping. And the word *mention* is the same word as *remember*. This would've triggered for Israel the experience of God's *kindness* when he *remembered* them in their slavery in Egypt.

Listen to what Joseph goes onto say, **[v15]**. That word *stolen* is associated with slavery. He did not become a slave because he was a prisoner of war or had to pay off a debt, as was in that day. No, he was *stolen* from his own land. This was entirely unjust.

AND his current imprisonment is unjust. He says, "I have done nothing that they should put me into the *pit*." That's another interesting choice of words...the same word for the literal pit Joseph's brothers threw him into in ch37. It's often used as a metaphor for death.

Joseph is asking to be raised from the dead through a kindness of remembrance that he's not gonna get from this cupbearer, leaving us as readers to wonder, "Is he gonna get it from God, or has God forgotten him?"

So the chief cupbearer gets favorable news. What about the chief baker? **[v16-17]** You can almost hear his tone as he's retelling his dream, anticipating good news like the cupbearer got. Except the imagery here isn't quite the same. Birds eating out of a basket on his head...that's odd. **[v18]**

Ok, so far so good. Just like the cupbearer who would be released in 3 days. **[v19a]** Sounds just like what would happen to cupbearer—Pharoah would “lift up his head” which is a metaphor for honor. But then it turns. **[v19]** His head is coming off and his body will be hung from a tree (perhaps more accurately, impaled by a pole). And birds will devour his dead carcass.

This is an Egyptian's worst nightmare because they believed the *WAY* a person's body was handled after death reflects what will happen to him in his afterlife. (Which is why Egyptian Pharoah's bodies were delicately preserved.) Both dreams come true. **[vv20-23]** He had one simple request: “Remember me.” But he was *forgotten*.

That word *forgot* is used in Scripture to describe something God *never* does. He *never* forgets his people. Psalm 9:12, “He does not forget the cry of the afflicted.” But what about Joseph? It looks like he’s been forgotten.

How would you respond if you were Joseph? In those times in your life when it *feels* like, “God has forgotten me,” how do you respond? Self-pity, sullenness, sulking? *The key* is to remember that you only FEEL forgotten. You’re not truly forgotten! God NEVER forgets his people, even when it really feels like he has.

I mean, doesn’t it LOOK LIKE God forgot Joseph? Surely he was tempted to *feel* that way! That’s why you must fight to believe: God always remembers his people when they’re in the pit. How do you know? This takes us to...

2) God raises his people from the pit.[41:1a]

Two years, nothing changed. Two years! Would you start to lose hope? **[vv1-4]** Clearly an odd dream that would’ve freaked out Pharaoh because it includes some strengths of Egypt: The Nile river and healthy cattle.

And so it's quite shocking that thin ugly cows ALSO come out of the Nile right after them, which makes you wonder: Is something gonna happen to the Nile? Is it gonna stop nourishing life? Why do thin cows eat the plump cows!

It gets weirder. **[vv5-7]** This dream now hits the agricultural life of Egypt, first showing abundance in the seven ears of grain on one stalk—an unusual phenomenon. But even more unusual is grain swallowing up grain.

These dreams really bothered Pharaoh because the images—the Nile, cows, grain—were associated with Egyptian gods. (One Egyptian goddess, named Hathor, was a cow!) All of Pharaoh's sense of security was shattered in these dreams. How do you think he feels when he wakes up? **[v8]**

That literally reads, “Pharaoh told them his dream [singular], but there was none who could interpret them [plural],” which tells us that Pharaoh likely saw the dreams as one, whereas these professional dream-interpretors (that's who “magicians” were)

and these wise men (who were supposed to be masters of any given subject), could not interpret them...probably because they thought they were two different dreams.

So Pharaoh's heart is unsettled. And guess who catches wind of this? **[v9]** Same word Joseph used two years earlier, "Remember me." Took him long enough! **[vv10-13]** Notice he credits Joseph for his dream-interpreting skills. And Pharaoh buys it. **[v14]**

That happened REALLY fast. He makes himself presentable to Pharaoh, which meant he shaved not only his beard, but his head too, because Egyptians valued a clean shave. **[vv15-16]** He wants no credit for himself! He is confident God will provide a right interpretation and God's interpretation will happen. Which shows Joseph's faith, because his own dreams have yet to be fulfilled!—the dreams he dreamed 13 years prior of his brothers bowing down to him. For a long time it looked there was no possible way they could be fulfilled! **[Read/explain vv17-24]**

Joseph gives no hesitation of an interpretation of the dream. **[v25]** Catch this: Pharaoh's dreams are talk about the same event that is about to occur, and Joseph says, "This event is what GOD is going to do." What's God gonna do? **[vv26-28]**

Get this: Joseph is saying God is ultimately in control of nature. He is in control of when the land is plentiful and when it is famished. And he's in control of the precise timing of it—seven years each. God, in his kindness, is pulling back the curtain of his providence to show Pharaoh what's to come over the next 14 years. **[vv29-32]**

"You're not getting out of this! This is going to happen! It's fixed." Why? Because the doubling of the dreams function like two witnesses to the event. Interestingly, the dreams had 13 years prior were doubled, as well. But they have not yet been fulfillment. In this statement, Joseph is showing he's just as confident in his own dreams being fulfilled as he is Pharaoh's. That's a lot of faith, especially in light of all he's been through!

So what should Pharaoh do? Joseph boldly offers counsel. **[vv33-36]** It's a good plan: 1) select a point person who 2) oversees a team who will execute the vision, and 3) institutionalize a national rationing system— 20% tax on the people's food to store up when the famine comes.

Though it is a good plan, Joseph offered it unsolicited! Perhaps Pharaoh will say, "How dare you speak so boldly to your king!" **[vv37-38]** He's standing right in front of you! And he knows it. **[v39]** That's a knock on all the wisemen and magicians of the land who couldn't interpret his dream. Pharaoh is impressed. **[v40]**

In a matter of a maybe a few hours, Joseph went from the pit to becoming the second most powerful man in the known world. Get this! Don't ever forget: God's timing is always right! Always. Imagine if the cupbearer remembered Joseph right after he got out of prison. It would've been two years too soon! God's timing is always right! **[vv41-42]**

The signet ring gives Joseph the authority to validate documents and decrees in the king's name. And notice, royal *garments* are put on Joseph. *Garments* have played an important role in his life; not for his good...seemingly. The word *garment* was used 6x in ch39 when Potiphar's wife used Joseph's garment as false evidence of abuse.

Now, Joseph has on new royal garments, showing his status change from slave to prince. **[vv43-45]** His Egyptian name validates his authority in Egypt, as he travels the land to prepare for the coming famine.

God will not leave his people in the pit forever. He *will* raise them out of it, eventually.... BECAUSE he does not forget his people. He remembers them. You are not forgotten by God, no matter how much you *feel* like you are. You're not! God raises his people from the pit...always...eventually.

3) God's salvation from the pit extends to all peoples. [v46a] He was 17 when he showed up to Egypt. 13 years! One person said, God's

“providence is utterly sovereign but it in no hurry to accomplish its divine purposes.” (ESV, 350) **[v46b-49]** He’s doing exactly what he said should be done in this time of fruitfulness. And Joseph himself experiences fruitfulness in this time. **[vv50-52]**

Mannasseh means “forget;” *Ephraim* means “fruitful.” Interestingly, they are *not* Egyptian names. They’re Hebrew names, showing Joseph has hope to connect with his family.

Then comes the famine. **[vv53-55]** Notice, there’s not just famine in Egypt; it’s spread to all the surrounding lands. So Egypt becomes the place where all peoples flock to get food. **[vv56-57]** Do you see? It was through Joseph’s providential rise from the pit to a place of power that salvation from the pit (i.e., death) came to all peoples on the earth!

And who will end up coming to Egypt—to Joseph—to buy food? Joseph’s brothers! 300 miles away, who, all those years before, laughed at the prospect of him ruling over

them. God's plan will prevail, even if it takes longer than we think it should.

Conclusion

God was entirely in charge of Joseph's plight from the pit to a place of power. This pattern occurs throughout the storyline of the Bible: 1) God remembers his people in the pit, 2) He raises them out of the pit, and 3) through that resurrection, salvation extends to all peoples. This is what happened with Israel in Exodus. They're in the pit as slaves in Egypt, but God raises them from the pit through Moses' miraculous deliverance. And then God tells them salvation will extend to the rest of the world through them.

How did that happen? It happened when the true Israelite came to this earth...the one who went down into the pit of death—the grave for three days. But Acts 2 says God remembered him and would not let him see corruption in the pit, so he loosed the pangs of death from him and raised from the pit.

And that resurrection from the pit brought salvation to all peoples. Jesus Christ was raised from the pit of death so that you would never be forgotten in the pit. **[Gospel]**

The only way God could forget you is if he forgot Jesus in the tomb! But as Acts 2 says “It was not possible for Jesus to be held by pangs of death,” so too, it’s not possible for God to forget you. Remember that when you’re in the pit, and some of you are...right now. You feel...

- The loneliness of singleness.
- The weight of relational conflict.
- The uncertainty of financial instability.
- The loss of comfort in good health.
- The struggle of abandonment by friends.

You feel like you’re in the pit and it feels like God has forgotten you.

Remember, and do not forget: what you *feel* is not always what is true. God *cannot* forget you. Cling to that truth. Remember the resurrection of Jesus Christ. God *cannot* forget you. He will always remember you, and he will bring you out of the pit...eventually.