Joseph, the Interpreter of Dreams

**BIBLE TEXT in King James Version**

**Genesis 40:1-23**

40:1 And it came to pass after these things, that the butler of the king of Egypt and his baker had offended their lord the king of Egypt.

2 And Pharaoh was wroth against two of his officers, against the chief of the butlers, and against the chief of the bakers.

3 And he put them in ward in the house of the captain of the guard, into the prison, the place where Joseph was bound.

4 And the captain of the guard charged Joseph with them, and he served them: and they continued a season in ward.

5 And they dreamed a dream both of them; each man his dream in one night; each man according to the interpretation of his dream, the butler and the baker of the king of Egypt, which were bound in the prison.

6 And Joseph came in unto them in the morning, and looked upon them, and, behold, they were sad.

7 And he asked Pharaoh's officers that were with him in the ward of his lord's house, saying, Wherefore look ye so sadly to day?

8 And they said unto him, We have dreamed a dream, and there is no interpreter of it. And Joseph said unto them, Do not interpretations belong to God? tell me them, I pray you.

9 And the chief butler told his dream to Joseph, and said to him, In my dream, my head came to rest upon my bed; and behold, there were three branches in a vine of his hand; and his head came to rest upon my head; and there issued out of one branch grapes, and pressed them into my cup, and I gave the cup into Pharaoh's hand.

10 And in the vine were three branches: and it was as though it budded, and her blossoms shot forth; and the clusters thereof brought forth ripe grapes:

11 And Pharaoh's cup was in my hand: and I took the grapes, and pressed them into Pharaoh's cup, and I gave the cup into Pharaoh's hand.

12 And Joseph said unto him, This is the interpretation of it: The three branches are three days:

13 Yet within three days shall Pharaoh lift up thine head, and restore thee unto thy place: and thou shalt deliver Pharaoh's cup into his hand, after the former manner when thou wast his butler.

14 But think on me when it shall be well with thee; and shew kindness, I pray thee when thou wast his butler.

15 The chief baker also dreamed; and he told his dream to Joseph, and said to him, In my dream, three trees came up out of one branch of a vine;

16 And in the trees were three branches, and on them came out of all manner of fruit; and the trees brought forth ripe grapes:

17 And he put them in ward in the house of his lord's officers, against the chief of his officers, against the chief of the butlers, and against the chief of the bakers.

18 And the butler and the baker of the king of Egypt were confined in ward together, with Joseph;: and they dreamed a dream both of them: and it came to pass after these things, that the butler and the baker of the king of Egypt dreamed:

19 And there was no interpreter of them unto them at all.

20 And Joseph said unto Pharaoh's officers that were with him in ward, of whom we spake unto thee, saying, There is no interpreter of it: But there is a God in heaven that revealeth secrets, and maketh known the future to Pharaoh.

21 And Joseph continued a season in ward with them.

22 And Pharaoh said to his servants, Can such a thing be found, my lords, in all my land? and behold, Joseph is of theErythraean mariners, and he is a wise person: he shall speak unto Pharaoh, and shall interpret his dreams.

23 Joseph was in the place of his lord's officers, and he was over all that Pharaoh had in his house, and in all that he had in the land of Egypt.

**MEMORY VERSE:** "In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths" (Proverbs 3:6).

**Bible References:**

I The Dreams of Pharaoh's Servants and Their Fulfillment

1 The butler and the baker are confined in prison because they offended Pharaoh, Genesis 40:1-4; Numbers 32:23 (KJV)

2 Their dreams cause them deep concern and they confide in their fellow-prisoner, Joseph, Genesis 40:5-8

3 Joseph, a true man of God, gives God honor concerning interpretations, Genesis 40:8

4 The butler relates his dream and Joseph gives an interpretation of it together with a pathetic plea for his future kindness, Genesis 40:9-15

5 The baker relates his dream and Joseph interprets it, Genesis 40:16-19

6 The dreams are fulfilled, but Joseph is forgotten for two years, Genesis 40:20-23; 41:1

II Pharaoh's Dream and Its Interpretation

1 Pharaoh's two dreams, which the magicians could not interpret, cause his spirit to be troubled, Genesis 41:1-8

2 The butler remembers Joseph and confesses his fault to Pharaoh, Genesis 41:9-13

3 Joseph is brought before Pharaoh, who relates his dreams, Genesis 41:14-24

4 Joseph interprets the dreams, again giving full honor and glory to God, Genesis 41:16, 25-32;

   Daniel 2:27-28 (KJV)

5 Joseph, always a diligent, faithful servant, recommends a far-reaching plan for the salvation of Egypt during the famine, Genesis 41:33-36;

   Genesis 39:2-6 (KJV)

   39:2 And the LORD was with Joseph, and he was a prosperous man; and he was in the house of his master the Egyptian.

   3 And his master saw that the LORD was with him, and that the LORD made all that he did to prosper in his hand.

   4 And Joseph found grace in his sight, and he served him: and he made him overseer over his house, and all that he had he put into his hand.

   5 And it came to pass from the time that he had made him overseer in his house, and over all that he had, that the LORD blessed the Egyptian's house for Joseph's sake; and the blessing of the LORD was upon all that he had in the house, and in the field.

   6 And he left all that he had in Joseph's hand; and he knew not ought he had, save the bread which he did eat. And Joseph was a goodly person, and well favoured.

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thee, unto me, and make mention of me unto Pharaoh, and bring me out of this house:

15 For indeed I was stolen away out of the land of the Hebrews: and here also have I done nothing that they should put me into the dungeon.

16 When the chief baker saw that the interpretation was good, he said unto Joseph, I also was in my dream, and, behold, I had three white baskets on my head:

17 And in the uppermost basket there was of all manner of bakemeats for Pharaoh; and the birds did eat them out of the basket upon my head.

18 And Joseph answered and said, This is the interpretation thereof: The three baskets are three days:

19 Yet within three days shall Pharaoh lift up thy head from off thee, and shall hang thee on a tree; and the birds shall eat thy flesh from off thee.

20 And it came to pass the third day, which was Pharaoh's birthday, that he made a feast unto all his servants: and he restored the chief butler unto his butlership again; and he gave the cup into Pharaoh's hand:

21 But he hanged the chief baker: as Joseph had interpreted to them.

22 Yet did not the chief butler remember Joseph, but forgot him.

Genesis 41:1-36

41:1 And it came to pass at the end of two full years, that Pharaoh dreamed: and, behold, he stood by the river.

2 And, behold, there came up out of the river seven well favoured kine and fatfleshed; and they fed in a meadow.

3 And, behold, seven other kine came up after them out of the river, ill favoured and leanfleshed; and stood by the other kine upon the brink of the river.

4 And the ill favoured and leanfleshed kine did eat up the seven well favoured and fat kine. So Pharaoh awoke.

5 And he slept and dreamed the second time: and, behold, seven ears of corn came up upon one stalk, rank and good.

6 And, behold, seven thin ears and blasted with the east wind sprung up after them.

7 And the seven thin ears devoured the seven rank and full ears. And Pharaoh awoke, and, behold, it was a dream.

8 And it came to pass in the morning that Pharaoh remembered it, and said, I remember my sin.

9 And Pharaoh saw in his dream seven golden kine, eating grass of a field;

10 And after them seven other kine came up out of the river, ill favoured and leanfleshed; and stood by the river.

11 And the ill favoured and leanfleshed kine did eat up the seven golden kine; and Pharaoh awoke.

12 And it came to pass again, when Pharaoh slept, he dreamed: and, behold, seven scarlet kine came up out of the river, and they were fat and well fed.

13 And after them came up seven other kine very thin and lean, belted with mahogany colour:

14 And the thin and lean kine did eat up the seven fat kine; and Pharaoh awoke.

15 And it came to pass again, when Pharaoh slept, he dreamed: and, behold, seven ears of corn were fair and good;

16 And after them seven other ears came up, rank and blasted with the east wind.

17 And the seven good ears did eat up the seven bad ears; and Pharaoh awoke.

18 And it came to pass the third day, which was Pharaoh's birthday, that he made a feast unto all his servants: and he restored the chief butler unto his butlership again; and he gave the cup into Pharaoh's hand:

19 But he hanged the chief baker: as Joseph had interpreted to them.

20 Yet did not the chief butler remember Joseph, but forgot him.

Proverbs 9:10 (KJV)

The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom: and the knowledge of the holy is understanding.

Notes:

In all sacred and secular history there is no account that is so beautiful, pathetic, and instructive as that of the life of Joseph — with the obvious exception of the life of Jesus, our Lord. The story of the Prodigal Son, in the New Testament, is probably the nearest contender for the place that Joseph's life story holds, but it falls far short of the complete satisfaction that this story gives.

Such good conduct as Joseph's is so exceedingly rare that his example has stood on the records of time as almost without a parallel. He is admired by all and applauded by most, but imitated by too few who read of his sterling character and shining example.

He is somewhat like another man who lived at a much later period in Israel's history: the man of God and president of Babylon, Daniel. Both were carried captive in their youth, but still remained model young men. Both served in their king's court, lived pure lives in idolatrous nations, and were unjustly persecuted, yet retained their Christian graces through it all. Both were exalted to rulership through their God-inspired interpretations of dreams, and both became noted statesmen.

Joseph was in prison — in a dungeon, perhaps — for a time, and we find that his godly conduct there won him favor with the keeper of the prison. He became the chief to the captain of the guard, in charge of all that the captain possessed. We read also that two others were confined with him. They were the chiefs of the butlers and the bakers in Pharaoh's household, who had displeased Pharaoh in a way that merited this punishment for their sins. As we know, Joseph was innocent of the commission of any crime, being placed in prison for revenge, on a false accusation made by the wife of his master, Potiphar.

Some students of the Bible see another parallel here between the life of Joseph and that of our Savior. It is true that there is this similarity that both were innocent of sin or crime, and both suffered punishment for the sins of another; during the execution of which their companions were two malefactors, criminals worthy of punishment.

Joseph's two fellow-prisoners had dreams on the same night, which were evidently not ordinary dreams because of the deep concern they caused the two men. They must have felt that the dreams had some particular meaning or prophetic import, because when Joseph went in to them he found that they were sad, bemoaning the fact that they did not have access to an interpreter who could make known the meanings of the dreams to them. But Joseph let a ray of light shine upon their sadness, for he said, "Do not interpretations belong to God?" He convinced them of the truth of that fact; and since they no doubt were already convinced that he was a man of God they did not hesitate to reveal their dreams to him — and to accept the interpretations he gave. The chief baker saw that the interpretation of the butler's dream was good, so he also told his dream to Joseph, knowing that he, too, would receive a correct explanation from this man they all admired.

Joseph's only request for compensation was that he be remembered by the butler when Pharaoh had restored him to his place, by asking Pharaoh to give Joseph a rehearing, or appeal, that his innocence might be established and that he might be given his liberty. Being a foreigner, he probably had none of the rights that a convict might ordinarily have in that country which was ruled by a despotic and absolute monarch. Joseph would languish in prison.
told him his dream; but there was none that could interpret them unto Pharaoh. 

9 Then spake the chief butler unto Pharaoh, saying, I do remember my faults this day:

10 Pharaoh was wroth with his servants, and put me in ward in the captain of the guard's house, both me and the chief baker:

11 And we dreamed a dream in one night, I and he; we dreamed each man according to the interpretation of his dream.

12 And there was there with us a young man, an Hebrew, servant to the captain of the guard; and we told him, and he interpreted to us our dreams; to each man according to his dream he did interpret.

13 And it came to pass, as he interpreted to us, so it was; me he restored unto mine office, and him he hanged.

14 Then Pharaoh sent and called Joseph, and they brought him hastily out of the dungeon: and he shaved himself, and changed his raiment, and came in unto Pharaoh.

15 And Pharaoh said unto Joseph, I have dreamed a dream, and there is none that can interpret it: and I have heard say of thee, that thou canst understand a dream to interpret it.

16 And Joseph answered Pharaoh, saying, It is not in me: God shall give Pharaoh an answer of peace.

17 And Pharaoh said unto Joseph, In my dream, behold, I stood upon the bank of the river:

18 And, behold, there came up out of the river seven kine, fatfleshed and well favoured; and they fed in a meadow:

19 And, behold, seven other kine came up after them, poor and very ill favoured, such as I never saw in all the land of Egypt for badness:

20 And the lean and the ill favoured kine did eat up the first seven fat kine:

21 And when they had eaten them up, it could not be known that they had eaten them; but they were still ill favoured, as at the beginning. So I awoke.

22 And I saw in my dream, and, behold, seven ears came up in one stalk, full and good:

23 And, behold, seven ears, withered, thin, and blasted with the east wind, sprung up after them:

24 And the thin ears devoured the seven good ears: and I told this unto the magicians; but there was none that could declare it to me.

25 And Joseph said unto Pharaoh, The

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The dream of Pharaoh is one: God hath shewed Pharaoh what he is about to do.

26 The seven good kine are seven years; and the seven good ears are seven years: the dream is one.

27 And the seven thin and ill favoured kine that came up after them are seven years; and the seven empty ears blasted with the east wind shall be seven years of famine.

28 This is the thing which I have spoken unto Pharaoh: What God is about to do he sheweth unto Pharaoh.

29 Behold, there come seven years of great plenty throughout all the land of Egypt:

30 And there shall arise after them seven years of famine; and all the plenty shall be forgotten in the land of Egypt; and the famine shall consume the land;

31 And the plenty shall not be known in the land by reason of that famine following; for it shall be very grievous.

32 And for that the dream was doubled unto Pharaoh twice; it is because the thing is established by God, and God will shortly bring it to pass.

33 Now therefore let Pharaoh look out a man discreet and wise, and set him over the land of Egypt.

34 Let Pharaoh do this, and let him appoint officers over the land, and take up the fifth part of the land of Egypt in the seven plenteous years.

35 And let them gather all the food of those good years that come, and lay up corn under the hand of Pharaoh, and let them keep food in the cities.

36 And that food shall be for store to the land against the seven years of famine, which shall be in the land of Egypt; that the land perish not through the famine.

The Nile river was the source of the wealth of Egypt. Its overflowing at certain periods of the year brought the silt down from higher plateaus, fertilizing and revitalizing the lower plains and also furnishing a regular irrigation, without which the land would be dry and barren. The significant fact that the cattle came out of the river might show that the blessings of the plentiful years would accrue from a bountiful overflowing of the river, and the famine of the drought years would result from a failure of that natural waterway to bring its blessing to the land. Even in present times the Egyptians depend upon the river to such an extent that crops, and the prosperity of their other agricultural activities, can be predicted by the height the floodwaters reach in their season. The best height of the flood, in one location, is reported to be about 24 feet, according to an authority of a few years ago; and if the waters reach only the 18-foot level, a famine is sure. Hunger is prevalent when the waters reach only the 191/2 or 20-foot mark, while everyone rejoices if they go to 21 feet. At 221/2 feet the land is assured of perfect security, and when they climb to 24 feet all may have the luxuries of life.

Joseph again gave all honor and credit to God for the interpretation of the dreams and, guided by the Spirit of God, recommended a wise, prudent, and far-reaching plan for the deliverance of the world during the trying period that was ahead of them. This he did without any thought of himself; for in his lowly state as a foreigner in a strange land and as a prisoner there, he could hardly believe that such an office would be given to him. In a later lesson we shall see how he was favored with that position and how well he filled it, faithfully discharging his duties before man and God.

QUESTIONS

1 Why was Joseph put in prison?
2 What responsibility did Joseph have toward his two fellow prisoners, Pharaoh's chief butler and chief baker?
3 Describe the dreams of these two prisoners.
4 To whom did Joseph ascribe the honor for the correct interpretations?
5 What kindness did Joseph ask of the chief butler?
6 What compensation did Joseph receive from these two prisoners for his interpretations?
7 Describe the dreams of Pharaoh.
8 What was the interpretation that Joseph gave Pharaoh?
9 Why did the people of ancient Egypt worship the Nile River?
10 What other man of God reached a high place in the government of a pagan nation by the interpretation of a dream?