

JOSEPH, THE INTERPRETER OF DREAMS

BIBLE TEXT: Genesis 40:1-23; 41:1-36.

LESSON 35 Junior Course

MEMORY VERSE: "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God" (James 1:5).

BIBLE TEXT in King James Version

Genesis 40:1-23;

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, behold, a vine was before me;

¹⁰ And in the vine were three branches: and it was as though it

NOTES:

Still in Prison

The kings in the time of Joseph were very much like the dictators we have heard about in European countries in recent years. If someone displeased them, he would be put into prison without trial, and perhaps be forgotten for a long time.

Thus Joseph found himself in prison -- not for any wicked deed he had done, but because a woman's pride had been hurt, and she wanted to get revenge. Soon two men who had had high positions in the king's court joined him but they had done something to displease Pharaoh. Those wicked kings were always afraid some-one was trying to poison them, or kill them in some way; and perhaps that was the reason these men were under suspicion. It was the duty of the chief butler to serve wine to the ruling monarch; and, of course, the baker had charge of all the bread and pastry for the royal table.

Because of the favour God had given Joseph with his keepers, he was put in charge of the new prisoners. One morning when he came to them, perhaps to bring their breakfast, they looked troubled. Joseph was kind-hearted, and he was interested in knowing why they felt so sad. They told him about the dreams they had had.

The Egyptian people had many wise men and magicians, some of whom sought to read fortunes by the stars. It does not seem to have been unusual for people to tell their dreams to such a person, and get some kind of interpretation, but here in the prison there was no one to tell them the meaning of the dreams. Joseph assured them that they did not need the astrologers and soothsayers, because God alone could give the proper interpretation.

Joseph had been in Egypt about 11 years by this time, but in spite of his surroundings he had lived in such a way that he still had confidence that God would hear him when he prayed. He did not say: "Perhaps I will never get home again, so what does it matter how I live? None of my friends will know if I sin a little; and it will be much easier to get along with these people if I worship their gods." He lived to please God every day, remembering that God sees everything we do, and will reward us according to our works.

Dreams Interpreted

When this need arose for an answer from God, Joseph must have been happy indeed that he was in a position to get his prayers through. When he told the prisoners that interpretations belong to God, he could add with utmost confidence, "Tell me them [the dreams], I pray you." He was living so close to the Lord that he could claim oneness with Him, just as the Word speaks of the sanctified people: "For both he that sanctifieth and they who are sanctified are all of one: for which cause he is not ashamed to call them brethren" (Hebrews 2:11).

The butler told his dream first, and was very happy to hear Joseph say that it foretold his release in three days. As Joseph did not deserve to be in jail, and he wondered if he had been forgotten, he asked the butler to remember him when he was set at liberty. The butler should have been grateful enough to Joseph

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, 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 lifted

to try to help him get out. But as soon as the butler was free he forgot to have compassion on someone else who was suffering wrongfully. God is watching the hardheartedness of sinners, and they will someday receive His judgment. Jesus said: "Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to me. And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal" (Matthew 25:45, 46).

When the chief baker heard that the first interpretation was good he also told Joseph his dream. However, he was not so fortunate. It may be that he really had committed a deed worthy of punishment. He was taken from the prison in three days and beheaded and hanged on a tree just as Joseph had interpreted his dream.

For two more years Joseph was forgotten in the prison. It must have seemed a long time for him, and he must have been very much disappointed that the butler had been so thoughtless. But God never forgets His own, and though things do not always come to us as soon as we think they should, remember that God knows best and will bring things to pass in His time and for His glory. He does not want us to fret at delays, but has said, "Be still, and know that I am God" (Psalm 46:10). And again "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts" (Isaiah 55:9). If we could only learn to trust Him fully!

The King's Dreams

After two years the king dreamed two dreams that he thought were important, and he called in all the wise men and magicians of his realm to explain what they meant. But God had given him the dreams, and the servants of the devil could not understand them. We need spiritual understanding to know the meaning of the things of God.

Then the butler remembered what he should have done upon his release from prison. It would seem that the butler would have been so happy to have his old position back that he would have thought about it every day -- but he did not. He told the king that Joseph interpreted correctly the dreams he and the chief baker had had, and he believed the captive Hebrew could help the king. Pharaoh made haste to have Joseph brought before him, and he told Joseph the disturbing dreams. Joseph did not take any credit for his ability to interpret dreams, but gave God all the glory. We should always remember that God is the Giver of every good and every perfect gift; and if we do our work particularly well, or have some special accomplishments, we should not get exalted and think how good we are, but just thank God that He has given us these gifts.

Joseph seemed to know that God was going to bless the king, because he said, "God shall give Pharaoh an answer of peace."

Life in Egypt depended upon the River Nile. There was almost no rain, but agriculture was possible through irrigation from the river. Every year it overflows its banks, leaving a rich deposit of silt on the farmland, and, also watering the ground for a time. In recent years dams have been built to control the floods and store water for the dry years, but in those days if the water came too high and stayed on the ground too long so that crops could not be planted in time, the result was famine. Likewise, if the water did not come high enough, crops could not grow, and again there would be famine. As the Egyptians realised their living depended on the Nile River they worshiped it as a god.

As we can see by Pharaoh's first dream, the years of plenty

up the head of the chief butler and of the chief baker among his servants.

²¹ And he restored the chief butler unto his butlership again; and he gave the cup into Pharaoh's hand:

²² But he hanged the chief baker: as Joseph had interpreted to them.

²³ Yet did not the chief butler remember Joseph, but forgot him.

Genesis 41:1-36.

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 his spirit was troubled; and he sent and called for all the magicians of Egypt, and all the wise men thereof: and Pharaoh told them his dream; but there was none that could interpret them unto Pharaoh.

would probably come from a favourable condition of the river; and the years of famine, which follow would also come from the condition of the river.

In the second dream was added another terror -- that of the east wind. This wind blows across the Arabian Desert, and is very hot by the time it gets to Egypt. Travellers say they have seen it coming suddenly as a purple haze; and being warned by the natives, they would fall quickly on their faces to the ground in order to get enough air to keep alive. Even after such precaution, one tourist said he had breathed enough of that hot air to make it necessary for him to be in a cooler climate several months before he got over the effects of it. Any crops that might have come up in spite of the lack of water would be blasted by this terrible wind.

The Interpretation

Joseph told Pharaoh that God was showing him that He would send seven years of ideal conditions in which crops would grow abundantly but they would be followed by seven years of famine. Seven years without any crops would bring terrible suffering upon the earth, and many people would die unless provisions were made ahead of time. Joseph encouraged the king to save up food during the years of exceptional plenty to feed the people when the famine came.

QUESTIONS

1. Was Joseph correct in his interpretation of the dreams of the baker and the butler?
2. What did Joseph ask the chief butler to do for him?
3. Did Joseph take the credit for being able to interpret dreams?
4. Why did God give Pharaoh two dreams with the same meaning?
5. Do you think God had a purpose in permitting Joseph to be in Egypt?

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 and leanfleshed, 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 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.