

JOSEPH, THE INTERPRETER OF DREAMS

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

LESSON 35 Senior Course

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

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, behold, a vine *was* before me;

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

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)

But if ye will not do so, behold, ye have sinned against the LORD: and be sure your sin will find you out.

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)

2:27 Daniel answered in the presence of the king, and said, The secret which the king hath demanded cannot the wise *men*, the astrologers, the magicians, the soothsayers, shew unto the king;

28 But there is a God in heaven that revealeth secrets, and maketh known to the king Nebuchadnezzar what shall be in the latter days. Thy dream, and the visions of thy head upon thy bed, are these;

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.

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 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

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 his spirit was troubled; and he sent and called for all the magicians of Egypt, and all the wise men thereof: and Pharaoh

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 them 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 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

until he died, unless he could obtain a hearing before Pharaoh; and to receive such a favor would require the intervention of someone who was interested enough in him to intercede before that haughty ruler.

We see again, in the actions of the butler, the truth of the sacred Proverb: "The tender mercies of the wicked are cruel" (Proverbs 12:10). He received his freedom and was again exalted to his former place of honor in serving *his* king, but he forgot the man who had done so much for him in the hour of his great need.

All the good in the world originally comes from God, for we read in the Bible that "every good gift and every perfect gift is from above" (James 1:17); from God, the Father, Who "maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust" (Matthew 5:45).

We have God to thank for every good thing, every moment of happiness and joy, every day of peace the world knows, every breath of air, and every item of food and drink that we receive. And yet how few thank God for these bountiful blessings that we all partake of daily! Man, in his sinful state, is fundamentally ungrateful and unappreciative; but when the love of God comes in, it changes that sinful nature. A Christian gives thanks daily, hourly — momentarily — for all the blessings that he receives. "Rejoice evermore. Pray without ceasing. In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you" (I Thessalonians 5:16-18).

One cannot blame Joseph for making this request of the butler, that he might be free. When one is in the furnace of affliction it *is* a very difficult thing to see how the trial can fit into God's eternal plan, but we are assured by His eternal Word that "all things work together for good to them that love God" (Roman 8:28); and if we but stay in God's hand and in His will we shall be delivered from our affliction and suffering in due time, with a substantial blessing from the Giver of every good and perfect gift. Then as we look back over the experience, we shall be able to see how God permitted it for His glory and for the working out of some perfection in our life or in the lives of others.

Deliverance came in God's time. He remained faithful to God, no matter how adverse or disappointing the circumstances were, and God saw that he could be trusted. Some people are good Christians when they have to lean heavily and completely on the Lord for their existence, but they forget Him entirely when all is going well. God needs men who will love, serve, and honor Him; not only when they have to depend upon the grace of Heaven for strength and courage and every breath of their life, but who will not forget Him when the highest honors, fortunes, and blessings that the world can give are laid at their feet. And God saw that Joseph was that kind of man; and after he had suffered a while he was made perfect, established, strengthened, and settled by the grace of God, Whom he loved.

The dreams that God gave Pharaoh were significant: first, the fat and the lean cattle; and then, the full and the blasted ears of corn. In both, the lean and blasted devoured the fat and full, and were none the better for it. The interpretation that God gave Pharaoh, through His servant Joseph, was that there would be seven years of plenty followed by seven years of famine. It has been remarked that the two phases of the dream probably showed that all branches of agriculture would be affected. The dream of the cattle foretold that livestock would be abundant in the first period and so diminished and impoverished in the final period that they would be of no value as food for hungry people; while the dream of the corn showed that the products of the field — the grains and vegetables — would grow in great profusion in the first period and

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.

be killed by the hot, dry, and blasting winds from the eastern desert in the later period.

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 19½ or 20-foot mark, while everyone rejoices if they go to 21 feet. At 22½ 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?