



## The Book of Genesis

Verses 40:1-23

August 11, 2019

Last week we studied about how Joseph was sold to Potiphar. Even though he was in his situation because of his brothers' jealousy and through no fault of his own, he kept his focus on serving God by being the best he could be in the situation into which he had been placed.

**Genesis 40:1-4** – *Some time later, Pharaoh's chief cup-bearer and chief baker offended their royal master. <sup>2</sup> Pharaoh became angry with these two officials, <sup>3</sup> and he put them in the prison where Joseph was, in the palace of the captain of the guard. <sup>4</sup> They remained in prison for quite some time, and the captain of the guard assigned them to Joseph, who looked after them.*

The first thing to notice here is that the prison is located within the palace of the captain of the guard. This "prison" was apparently no San Quentin! You'll also notice that it was the captain of the guard who assigned these two prisoners to Joseph. The captain of the guard was, of course, Potiphar. So, in addition to his duties as captain of the guard, Potiphar's duties also included the administration of the special prison used for detaining Pharaoh's prisoners. The keeper of the prison is not named, but the keeper was Potiphar's deputy.

It's been suggested by one commentary that it was likely that Potiphar didn't really believe his wife's accusations against Joseph since he gave Joseph a position of some authority in the prison by placing other prisoners under his care. Also, execution was reportedly normal for rape cases which didn't happen here. So who knows, maybe Potiphar really was keeping Joseph in prison in part to protect him from his wife as was suggested in our lesson last week!

We're never told what the crimes of the cup-bearer and the chief baker are. But, it has been supposed that since one was in charge of Pharaoh's drink and the other was in charge of his food, then it was probable that there was a plot to murder Pharaoh, perhaps by poisoning, and these two men were the likely suspects.

Then again, we also have the following from the Jewish writings:

*"The chief baker was put into prison because a pebble had been found in the pastry he baked for Pharaoh, and he was guilty of a misdemeanor because he had neglected the sifting of the flour. A fly had happened to fall into the wine that the chief butler poured for Pharaoh, but that could not be construed as caused by any negligence on his part. Thus, the butler had not committed a punishable offense."*

However, no matter what the original reason was that they were imprisoned, we know that God was using the situation in His plan for Joseph. There is a very good point here of which we should take note. When bad stuff happens to us, sometimes it may really have less to do with us in the short term and more to do with it being a piece of the puzzle in God's long-term plan. Sometimes, that piece of the puzzle might be that God is trying to grow or mold us through adverse circumstances.

Although he doesn't know it yet, Joseph will soon be placed in a position of authority over all of Egypt just underneath Pharaoh. Even though he did rely upon God, Joseph would still need maturity and experience to wisely fill a position of authority like that. The hardships that Joseph had experienced would help mature Joseph and prepare him for the mantle he would soon be wearing.

**Genesis 40:5-7** – <sup>5</sup> *While they were in prison, Pharaoh's cup-bearer and baker each had a dream one night, and each dream had its own meaning.* <sup>6</sup> *When Joseph saw them the next morning, he noticed that they both looked upset.* <sup>7</sup> *"Why do you look so worried today?" he asked them.*

How about that! Here, Joseph had been thrown in a pit and then sold to slave traders by his "loving" brothers. He was then thrown into prison after being falsely accused when he had done nothing but try to be faithful to the man who had bought him from the slave traders and, yet, we find him still concerned about the needs of others! What a heart of Christ this man had! Would that we all had that kind of heart!

**Genesis 40:8** – <sup>8</sup> *And they replied, "We both had dreams last night, but no one can tell us what they mean."* *"Interpreting dreams is God's business," Joseph replied. "Go ahead and tell me your dreams."*

Now, that is stepping out on faith! This should be an encouragement to us to do the same. We haven't really been presented with any direct evidence so far that Joseph possessed the ability to interpret dreams. In the dreams that he had in the past, he didn't supply an interpretation of them although they did seem pretty straight-forward. However, that didn't stop Joseph from having complete faith that God would interpret these dreams for him.

**Genesis 40:9-15** – <sup>9</sup> *So the chief cup-bearer told Joseph his dream first. "In my dream," he said, "I saw a grapevine in front of me.* <sup>10</sup> *The vine had three branches that began to bud and blossom, and soon it produced clusters of ripe grapes.* <sup>11</sup> *I was holding Pharaoh's wine cup in my hand, so I took a cluster of grapes and squeezed the juice into the cup. Then I placed the cup in Pharaoh's hand."*

<sup>12</sup> *"This is what the dream means," Joseph said. "The three branches represent three days.* <sup>13</sup> *Within three days Pharaoh will lift you up and restore you to your position as his chief cup-bearer.* <sup>14</sup> *And please remember me and do me a favor when things go well for you. Mention me to Pharaoh, so he might let me out of this place.* <sup>15</sup> *For I was kidnapped from my homeland, the land of the Hebrews, and now I'm here in prison, but I did nothing to deserve it."*

You'll notice just how specific the interpretation was that Joseph gave the butler. In just 3 days it would become obvious whether Joseph was telling the truth or not. Again, it's not really revealed to us just how Joseph was able to interpret dreams but he did make it clear *before* he had heard either dream that interpreting them was "God's business." His confidence that God could and would provide the interpretation of the dreams was so high that Joseph proclaimed the fact beforehand. He also made sure that it was known that it wasn't his ability that would do this, it would be God's. That is a crucial point to note. Give God credit when credit is due Him!

Joseph's was a rare exhibition of faith. It may seem like a small feat to us but stepping out on faith when you don't *have* to do it can be a very difficult thing to do. God provided this opportunity for two obvious purposes. The first was as a vehicle to help secure Joseph's placement in Pharaoh's house. The other was to show His providence. If Joseph hadn't done his part then God would not have received the glory for what He had done. Joseph would have essentially robbed God of the glory that was due Him.

**Genesis 40:16-19** – <sup>16</sup> *When the chief baker saw that Joseph had given the first dream such a positive interpretation, he said to Joseph, “I had a dream, too. In my dream there were three baskets of white pastries stacked on my head.”<sup>17</sup> The top basket contained all kinds of pastries for Pharaoh, but the birds came and ate them from the basket on my head.”*

<sup>18</sup> *“This is what the dream means,” Joseph told him. “The three baskets also represent three days. <sup>19</sup> Three days from now Pharaoh will lift you up and impale your body on a pole. Then birds will come and peck away at your flesh.”*

Wow! The news was not so upbeat on this second interpretation! I’m sure the baker thought he would get a nice, little interpretation about his dream, too, because it seemed on the surface to be remarkably similar to the butler’s dream... but it wasn’t! You can see that Joseph didn’t pull any punches. Sometimes there’s just no silver lining to be revealed and we have to say it like it is. The old saying, “if you can’t something nice then don’t say anything at all,” doesn’t always cut it. You don’t have to be brutal and you should never say it with the intent to hurt but there are times when the truth must be told and there’s no *nice* way to spin it.

**Genesis 40:20-23** – <sup>20</sup> *Pharaoh’s birthday came three days later, and he prepared a banquet for all his officials and staff. He summoned his chief cup-bearer and chief baker to join the other officials. <sup>21</sup> He then restored the chief cup-bearer to his former position, so he could again hand Pharaoh his cup.<sup>22</sup> But Pharaoh impaled the chief baker, just as Joseph had predicted when he interpreted his dream. <sup>23</sup> Pharaoh’s chief cup-bearer, however, forgot all about Joseph, never giving him another thought.*

Three days later and what was predicted has come to pass. As mentioned earlier, it is speculated that there might have been an attempt on Pharaoh’s life by poisoning him. In a case like that, the two likely candidates would be the one preparing his food or the one serving him the food. If that were indeed the case then it looks like it was decided that the baker was the culprit and the cup-bearer was an innocent bystander.

Like humans often do, the cup-bearer forgot all about those who helped him get back to his former position of power (Joseph, in this case). But, it was all part of God’s plan to be revealed at the right time which we’ll find out about next week.

Question and answer time!

- What are some other noted times when the faithful have stepped out on faith that God would assist, deliver, or provide for them when they really didn’t have to do it?
- How did they know that God would deliver or provide for them at those times?
- Have you ever stuck your neck out and placed your faith in the fact that God would provide? How did that work out for you?
- How can we know in our lives when it’s time for us to make a bold stand of faith in “smaller” matters?
- How can we proclaim God’s glory to others when we’ve been helped by Him without “making it weird?”

In closing, we should remember this: When you feel like things aren’t going your way and your prayers are not making it past the ceiling, know that God *will* answer your prayers at the right time and in the right way. It may not be *when* you expect Him to answer and it probably won’t be exactly *how* you expect Him to answer but know that He *will* answer you!