

GENESIS

The Cupbearer and the Baker

¹ Sometime later, the cupbearer and the baker of the king of Egypt offended their master, the king of Egypt. ² Pharaoh was angry with his two officials, the chief cupbearer and the chief baker, ³ and put them in custody in the house of the captain of the guard, in the same prison where Joseph was confined. ⁴ The captain of the guard assigned them to Joseph, and he attended them.

After they had been in custody for some time, ⁵ each of the two men—the cupbearer and the baker of the king of Egypt, who were being held in prison—had a dream the same night, and each dream had a meaning of its own.

⁶ When Joseph came to them the next morning, he saw that they were dejected. ⁷ So he asked Pharaoh's officials who were in custody with him in his master's house, "Why do you look so sad today?"

⁸ "We both had dreams," they answered, "but there is no one to interpret them."

Then Joseph said to them, "Do not interpretations belong to God? Tell me your dreams."

⁹ So the chief cupbearer told Joseph his dream. He said to him, "In my dream I saw a vine in front of me, ¹⁰ and on the vine were three branches. As soon as it budded, it blossomed, and its clusters ripened into grapes. ¹¹ Pharaoh's cup was in my hand, and I took the grapes, squeezed them into Pharaoh's cup and put the cup in his hand."

¹² "This is what it means," Joseph said to him. "The three branches are three days. ¹³ Within three days Pharaoh will lift up your head and restore you to your position, and you will put Pharaoh's cup in his hand, just as you used to do when you were his cupbearer. ¹⁴ But when all goes well with you, remember me and show me kindness; mention me to Pharaoh and get me out of this prison. ¹⁵ I was forcibly carried off from the land of the Hebrews, and even here I have done nothing to deserve being put in a dungeon."

¹⁶ When the chief baker saw that Joseph had given a favorable interpretation, he said to Joseph, "I too had a dream: On my head were three baskets of bread. ¹⁷ In the top basket were all kinds of baked goods for Pharaoh, but the birds were eating them out of the basket on my head."

¹⁸ "This is what it means," Joseph said. "The three baskets are three days. ¹⁹ Within three days Pharaoh will lift off your head and impale your body on a pole. And the birds will eat away your flesh."

²⁰ Now the third day was Pharaoh's birthday, and he gave a feast for all his officials. He lifted up the heads of the chief cupbearer and the chief baker in the presence of his officials: ²¹ He restored the chief cupbearer to his position, so that he once again put the cup into Pharaoh's hand—²² but he impaled the chief baker, just as Joseph had said to them in his interpretation.

²³ The chief cupbearer, however, did not remember Joseph; he forgot him.

Genesis 40:1-23 [NIV]

In this lesson we will observe Joseph as a prisoner. However, in Joseph's case, he is also managing the prisoners for the warden and interpreting the dreams of the Cupbearer and the Baker. Moreover, we expand our study to include the broader context of God's plan.

The first five verses of Genesis 40 indicate that sometime after Joseph had been imprisoned—we are not told how much time had passed—something happened between the Cupbearer, the Baker, and the Pharaoh that angered the Pharaoh so much that he threw both of them into the same prison, the Pharaoh's prison. This was the same prison where Joseph was

incarcerated. We are not told what transpired, but it must have been significant in order for the Pharaoh to throw them in his prison.

Furthermore, in verse four, we read, "after they had been in custody for some time," the two prisoners each had a dream on the same evening. (Again, no specific time is provided regarding when this occurred.) The next morning, seeing that both men appeared troubled, Joseph volunteered to interpret each man's dream, asking them "Do not interpretations belong to God? Tell me your dreams."

He then interpreted each dream: in three days, the Cupbearer will become a free man, however, the Baker will be executed. He then asked the Cupbearer, "but when all goes well with you, remember me and show me kindness; mention me to Pharaoh and get me out of this prison." Three days later, on the Pharaoh's birthday, the Cupbearer is freed and the Baker is executed. But the Cupbearer never mentions Joseph to the Pharaoh.

This story is very familiar to anyone who has read the book of Genesis or studied it in Sunday School. Once again, Joseph correctly interpreted both dreams, and once again, Joseph did not benefit; in fact, he was forgotten.

Let's take a closer look at Joseph by answering the following questions:

1. How old was Joseph when he was sold into slavery by his brothers and entered Egypt? (See Genesis 37:1-2.)
 - a. ANSWER: Joseph was 17 years old.
2. How long was Joseph in prison? (See Genesis 41:1.)
 - a. ANSWER: Two full years passed in prison after he interpreted the dreams of the Cupbearer and the Baker. We don't know long how long he had been there before this event, but we deduce that Joseph was in prison longer than two years.
3. How old was Joseph when he was subsequently made Overseer to the King, the Pharaoh? (See Genesis 41:46.)
 - a. ANSWER: He was 30 years old.
4. How old was Joseph when he worked as a servant for Potiphar and was thrown into prison? (See all of the above references in determining your answer.)
 - a. ANSWER: We know that he was 17 years old when he entered Egypt and shortly thereafter went to work for Potiphar. We also know that he was in prison two or more years and that he was thirty years old when he became the Pharaoh's Overseer. So we can assume that he probably served in Potiphar's house for somewhere between ten and eleven years, followed by two or three years in prison. We can build this conclusion based on the assertion that he had been in Egypt 13 years when he became Overseer.
5. Did the Cupbearer know that Joseph was innocent and did not belong in jail? (See Genesis 40:15 and Genesis 41:9-13.)
 - a. ANSWER: Yes, the Cupbearer knew of Joseph's situation, and he certainly knew that Joseph was the one who correctly interpreted his dream.
6. Why did the Cupbearer forget Joseph after his reinstatement (Genesis 40:23)? What do you think was the cause of his lapse in memory? (See Genesis 39:23, 40:8, and 41:16)
 - a. ANSWER: As we reflect back over the story of Joseph through these referenced verses, one thing forms a common thread: God was with Joseph, even in prison. Further, if we consider the entire story of Joseph's life and how God used him—not only to guide Egypt through a horrible famine, but also to lay the groundwork for those who would become God's chosen people, the Hebrews. We can see that nothing in Joseph's life was an accident or a coincidence. All that he experienced was according to God's perfect timing. Had the Cupbearer spoke about Joseph earlier, it would have been two years ahead of God's plan. As we will see in the coming chapters of Genesis, all will continue to be unfolded according to God's plan and not man's.

As we close this lesson, let's consider two specific scriptures: Jeremiah 29:11-13 and Isaiah 55:8. In these verses, God tells us that He has plan, that nothing is a coincidence in living a life following Christ. We are not called to a life of chaos. God is in control and has an eternal plan for each of us. God also tells us (in Isaiah 55:8) that "neither are your ways my ways." Often, we can only see things through our eyes and not God's. We want answers to be immediate, and we want those

answers to fit our expectations. When they do not, we assume that God has forgotten us—when nothing could be further from the truth.

Just as God was with Joseph no matter his circumstances, God is with us today and he will not abandon us. All we need do is to live as Joseph did, taking it one day at a time and giving God the credit. Joseph's faith in God stands as an eternal testament to the faithfulness of God. Jesus asks us to follow Him and not the world. In Hebrews 13:5 and Joshua 1:5, God tells us, "I will never leave you nor forsake you."

Let's live like God is with us all the time, and when we do, we will be a blessing to others, just as Joseph was.

In Christ,

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