

Genesis 40 - Joseph Interprets Dreams in Prison

A. Joseph meets the butler and the baker in prison.

1. (1-4) The Egyptian royal butler and baker are put into prison.
 - a. **The butler and the baker of the king of Egypt:** The **butler** was in charge of Pharaoh's wine. The **baker** was in charge of Pharaoh's food. They were imprisoned because they **offended their lord, the king of Egypt**. It is difficult to tell if it was in a minor or a major way. Considering how the account will develop, it is probable there was a plot to murder the Pharaoh (perhaps by poisoning).
 - i. But we never lose sight of the over-arching reason: whatever *external* reason they were sent to prison, they were *really* there to meet Joseph.
 - b. **The captain of the guard charged Joseph with them, and he served them:** This favorable treatment of Joseph by the **captain of the guard** "Potiphar."
 - c. **And he served them:** Even though Joseph had a position of high authority in the prison, he did not use it to make others serve him. He used his high position to serve others.
2. (5-7) Joseph shows concern for the butler and baker.
 - a. **Joseph came in to them in the morning and looked at them, and saw that they were sad:** This is a window into the heart of Joseph. Men who are consumed with anger and bitterness do not take a concern for the personal problems of others like this.
 - b. **Why do you look so sad today?** It would be easy - perhaps technically true - for Joseph to think that because of all the wrong done against him, everything should revolve around his own feelings and hurts. Instead, he cared that the butler and the baker looked **so sad** one day.
 - i. This is one of the keys to living like Jesus: being an others-centered person. Joseph could have justified certain self-centeredness in his life ("I have to take care of myself right now"), but he did not.
3. (8) Joseph invites them to tell him their disturbing dreams.
 - a. **Tell them to me, please:** This was not a case of mere discussion of dreams for the sake of curiosity or a form of fortune telling. Joseph saw these men were clearly disturbed by their dreams, and approached the dreams from a desire to meet their needs.
 - b. **Do not interpretations belong to God?** Joseph has experience with dreams. His two dreams about his future greatness antagonized his family (Genesis 37:5-11), and he was mocked as *the dreamer* (Genesis 37:19-20).
 - i. Joseph was confident that **God** knew what the dream was about.
 - c. **Do not interpretations belong to God?** God may certainly speak through dreams and many passages of Scripture show this (Genesis 20:3; 28:12; 31:11; 31:24; Numbers 12:6; 1 Samuel 28:6; Joel 2:28; Matthew 1:20; 2:13; 2:22). However, not every dream is a revelation from God. We must be careful about putting too much weight on dreams.

- i. Dreams can come just because our minds are busy: *A dream comes through much activity . . . For in the multitude of dreams and many words there is also vanity* (Ecclesiastes 5:3, 7).
- ii. The Bible warns of false prophets using dreams to give weight to their message (Deuteronomy 13:1-5, Jeremiah 23:25-28).

B. Joseph interprets their dreams.

1. (9-11) The butler explains his dream.
 - a. **In my dream a vine was before me, and in the vine were three branches:** Though this dream was from God, God used figures and pictures that made sense to the butler (a **vine, grapes**, and serving the Pharaoh wine).
2. (12-15) Joseph interprets the butler's dream and asks a favor.
 - a. **The three branches are three days. Now within three days Pharaoh will lift up your head and restore you to your place:** Joseph's interpretation of this dream came from God, not his own wisdom.
 - i. Joseph was bold enough to give an interpretation that could be proved right or wrong **within three days**. In only three days, everyone will know if Joseph was correct or not.
 - b. **Remember me when it is well with you:** Joseph asked the butler to work for his release. Though Joseph showed godly character in the Egyptian prison by not becoming angry and bitter in his heart, he wasn't stupid either. He wanted to get out, and used appropriate means to do so.
 - i. Joseph could have had "fatalistic faith," saying, "Well, if the LORD wants me out of prison, He will do it, and I won't have to do anything." It is true that Joseph will not get out of prison until the LORD wants it. But none of that precludes Joseph taking wise and good steps to accomplish what he thinks to be God's will. The butler won't remember until God wants him to anyway.
3. (16-19) The baker tells his dream and Joseph interprets it.
 - a. **When the chief baker saw that the interpretation was good:** The baker was encouraged that his companion had a good interpretation of his dream, but he found out his dream did not tell of good to come.
 - b. **Within three days Pharaoh will lift off your head from you and hang you on a tree:** Joseph was just as faithful to deliver the heavy message as he was to deliver the happy message. This is the mark of a godly preacher, who does not fail to bring the whole counsel of God.
 - i. "How many there are who are willing to preach the cupbearer's sermon but are unwilling to preach the baker's sermon!" (Boice)
 - c. **The birds will eat your flesh from you:** Whatever crime they were suspected of, the butler was innocent but the baker was guilty.
4. (20-23) The dreams come to pass exactly according to Joseph's interpretations.
 - a. **Now it came to pass on the third day:** The three days until Joseph was proved right must have been agonizing for the butler and the baker (though more so for the baker), yet Joseph was found to be a true messenger of God.

b. **Yet the chief butler did not remember Joseph, but forgot him:** Here Joseph is wronged again. He thought that butler's kindness might mean his release from prison, but it was not to be. God had another purpose.

i. All men God uses greatly, He first prepares greatly. Few are willing to endure the greatness of God's preparation. God orders both our *steps* and *stops*.

Paul's instructions to Timothy and Titus about the organization and oversight of the churches in Ephesus and Crete

1 Timothy 6; 2-10

Qualifications for Overseers

3:1 The saying is trustworthy: If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task. 2 Therefore an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, 3 not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. 4 He must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive, 5 for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God's church? 6 He must not be a recent convert, or he may become puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil. 7 Moreover, he must be well thought of by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace, into a snare of the devil.

Qualifications for Deacons

8 Deacons likewise must be dignified, not double-tongued, not addicted to much wine, not greedy for dishonest gain. 9 They must hold the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience. 10 And let them also be tested first; then let them serve as deacons if they prove themselves blameless. 11 Their wives likewise must be dignified, not slanderers, but sober-minded, faithful in all things. 12 Let deacons each be the husband of one wife, managing their children and their own households well. 13 For those who serve well as deacons gain a good standing for themselves and also great confidence in the faith that is in Christ Jesus.

False Teachers and True Contentment

Teach and urge these things. 3 If anyone teaches a different doctrine and does not agree with the sound words of our Lord Jesus Christ and the teaching that accords with godliness, 4 he is puffed up with conceit and understands nothing. He has an unhealthy craving for controversy and for quarrels about words, which produce envy, dissension, slander, evil suspicions, 5 and constant friction among people who are depraved in mind and deprived of the truth, imagining that godliness is a means of gain. 6 Now there is great gain in godliness with contentment, 7 for we brought nothing into the world,

and we cannot take anything out of the world. **8** But if we have food and clothing, with these we will be content. **9** But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. **10** For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs.

Titus 1; 5-15 and 2

Qualifications for Elders

5 This is why I left you in Crete, so that you might put what remained into order, and appoint elders in every town as I directed you— **6** if anyone is above reproach, the husband of one wife, and his children are believers and not open to the charge of debauchery or insubordination. **7** For an overseer, as God's steward, must be above reproach. He must not be arrogant or quick-tempered or a drunkard or violent or greedy for gain, **8** but hospitable, a lover of good, self-controlled, upright, holy, and disciplined. **9** He must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it.

10 For there are many who are insubordinate, empty talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision party. **11** They must be silenced, since they are upsetting whole families by teaching for shameful gain what they ought not to teach. **12** One of the Cretans, a prophet of their own, said, "Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons." **13** This testimony is true. Therefore rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith, **14** not devoting themselves to Jewish myths and the commands of people who turn away from the truth. **15** To the pure, all things are pure, but to the defiled and unbelieving, nothing is pure; but both their minds and their consciences are defiled. **16** They profess to know God, but they deny him by their works. They are detestable, disobedient, unfit for any good work.

Teach Sound Doctrine

2:1 But as for you, teach what accords with sound doctrine. **2** Older men are to be sober-minded, dignified, self-controlled, sound in faith, in love, and in steadfastness. **3** Older women likewise are to be reverent in behavior, not slanderers or slaves to much wine. They are to teach what is good, **4** and so train the young women to love their husbands and children, **5** to be self-controlled, pure, working at home, kind, and submissive to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be reviled. **6** Likewise, urge the younger men to be self-controlled. **7** Show yourself in all respects to be a model of good works, and in your teaching show integrity, dignity, **8** and sound speech that cannot be condemned, so that an opponent may be put to shame, having nothing evil to say about us. **9** Slaves are to be submissive to their own masters in everything; they are to be well-pleasing, not

argumentative, **10** not pilfering, but showing all good faith, so that in everything they may adorn the doctrine of God our Savior.

11 For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, **12** training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, **13** waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, **14** who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works.

15 Declare these things; exhort and rebuke with all authority. Let no one disregard you.

References: The Bible, Guzik, Boice