

Life of Joseph

Lessons in Humility, Leadership and Forgiveness

The Baker and the Cupbearer

- Sometime after Joseph's imprisonment and rise to power in the prison, Pharaoh's chief cupbearer and chief baker offended him and made him very angry [Gen 40:1-2].
 - A cupbearer would taste the wine before Pharaoh drank any to protect him from being poisoned.
 - The chief cupbearer was the leader of these men and was a trusted servant with political influence.
 - Nehemiah served as a trusted cupbearer to King Artaxerxes I of Persia [Neh 1:11-2:1].
 - A baker was responsible for preparing foods for Pharaoh that would not cause him to get sick.
 - The chief baker was the leader of these men and, like the chief cupbearer, was a trusted servant with considerable political influence.
- Pharaoh's anger led him to throw the baker and cupbearer into Potiphar's jail where Joseph had been imprisoned [Gen 40:3].
- Potiphar directed that Joseph be put in charge of these two men [Gen 40:4].
 - They were apparently in confinement for a while.
 - This indicates their offense was serious.
- The two men both had a dream the same night, but the dreams were different with two different meanings [Gen 40:5].
 - The use of the phrase "king of Egypt" for Pharaoh both here and in verse 1 emphasizes the service aspect of the positions these two men held.
 - These dreams came from God and provided Joseph with an opportunity to show God's power.
- The dreams disturbed the men and Joseph quickly picked up on that [Gen 40:6-7].
 - The word "dejected" in verse 6 is זָאֵף (za'aph) which includes an element of anger [2 Chr 16:10; Isa 30:30; Micah 7:9].
 - This episode shows that Joseph was a good attendant and very perceptive concerning the countenance of the prisoners under his charge.
- The men told Joseph that they had dreamed dreams which no one could interpret prompting Joseph to ask them to tell him about the dreams [Gen 40:8].
 - Joseph made it clear that God is in charge of interpreting dreams [Dan 2:27-28].
 - Joseph showed his humility by politely asking the prisoners to reveal their dreams to him.

- The chief cupbearer explained his dream of the vine with three branches [Gen 40:9-11].
 - This dream is filled with “three” references.
 - The grapevine did three things as it (1) budded, (2) blossomed and (3) ripened.
 - The cupbearer also did three things as he (1) took the grapes, (2) squeezed them into the cup and (3) put the cup into Pharaoh’s hand.
- Joseph explained the interpretation of the dream giving the cupbearer very good news of his restoration to office [Gen 40:12-13].
 - Only understanding given from God could have enabled Joseph to know that the fulfillment would occur in three days.
 - The phrase “lift up your head” is used with various meanings in this passage [vv. 13, 19, 20].
- Joseph then pleaded with the cupbearer to remember him once he was restored to his position before Pharaoh [Gen 40:14-15].
 - Joseph explained his innocence and simply asked the cupbearer to mention him to Pharaoh so he could be released from prison.
 - The word “kidnapped” is גָּנַב (ganab) which means “stolen away”.
- The favorable interpretation of the chief cupbearer’s dream encouraged the baker to reveal his dream to Joseph [Gen 40:16-17].
 - This dream only has one “three” – the baskets.
 - Pharaoh is not found in this dream and the baker is not seen performing his duties.
 - The birds eating out of the basket means that Pharaoh would never receive the baked goods.
- Joseph explained the interpretation of the dream giving the baker the bad news of his impending death [Gen 40:18-19].
 - The three day time period is also valid for the interpretation of the baker’s dream.
 - The phrase “lift up your head” is followed by “from you” and is descriptive of the baker’s death by hanging, not a literal decapitation.
- The interpretations which God had given to Joseph were exactly fulfilled [Gen 40:20-22].
 - Pharaoh’s “birthday” may have been a celebration of the day of his accession to the throne.
 - It was common practice during these celebrations for prisoners to be released.
 - This passage does not explain the reasoning behind Pharaoh’s actions toward the two men.
- As often happens when people receive a blessing, the cupbearer forgot about Joseph after being restored to his office [Gen 40:23].
 - Most importantly, God did not forget about Joseph.
 - The cupbearer would eventually be reminded of Joseph two years later when Pharaoh had a dream [Gen 41:9-13].