

**CALVARY PANDAN BIBLE-
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH**
[Adapted from Bethel Bible-
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DHW BIBLE CLASS

LESSON 31

THE BOOK OF GENESIS

Chapter 40

INTRODUCTION

One of the perplexing experiences of a Christian is that in living his faith, he often provokes hostility and some times he finds himself in adverse circumstances. He feels this way because he thinks that since God is all-powerful and is in control, and that He is a God of justice and love, God should vindicate him against his enemies and deliver him from bad situations. What actually is God doing, allowing all these things to happen to His children?. The answer to these problems in life is not easy, but if we are willing to be humble and patient, we will find the answer in the Word of God. The life of Joseph in Genesis serves this purpose of comforting and encouraging us never to give up in our Christian walk.

OUTLINE

A. Pharaoh's Butler and Baker were Imprisoned (40:1-4).

1. Pharaoh's chief butler and baker offended him and he was angry against them (vv.1- 2).
2. Pharaoh imprisoned them in the same cell in which Joseph was imprisoned (v.:3).
3. The butler and baker were put into the care of Joseph (v.4).

B. Joseph Still Trusted in God (40:5-8).

1. The butler and the baker both dreamed a dream (v.5).
2. Joseph asked them the reason for their sadness (vv.6-7).
3. The butler and baker said that there was no one to interpret their dreams (v.8a).
4. Joseph told them that God only can interpret dreams and requested them to tell him their dreams (v.8b).

C. The Butler Told His Dream (40:9-15).

1. He dreamt of three branches of grapes, and he pressed the ripened grapes into Pharaoh's cup, and gave it to him (vv.9-11).
2. Joseph interpreted that within three days, his position as Pharaoh's butler would be restored (vv.12-13).
3. Joseph requested the butler to remember him and speak a good word to Pharaoh to secure his release (vv.14-15).

D. The Baker Told His Dream (40:16-19).

1. He dreamt of three baskets full of baked food and the birds came to eat them (vv.16, 17).
2. Joseph interpreted that within three days he would be hanged (v.18, 19).

E. The Fulfilment of the Dreams (40:20-23)

1. On the third day, Pharaoh celebrated his birthday (v.20).
2. Pharaoh restored the position of the butler (v.21).
3. But Pharaoh hanged the baker (v.22).
4. The butler forgot about Joseph (v.23).

COMMENTARY

God's Providence

The Westminster Confession of Faith defines the providence of God thus:

God, the great Creator of all things, doth uphold, direct, dispose, and govern all creatures, actions, and things from the greatest even to the least, by his most wise and holy providence, according to his infallible foreknowledge, and the free and immutable counsel of his own will, to the praise of the glory of his wisdom, power, justice, goodness, and mercy (Chapter V).¹

We have already seen that God's plan and purpose for Joseph cannot be thwarted by man when Joseph was put in prison, instead of being sentenced to death for the alleged attempted rape of Potiphar's wife. Now two of the king's most trusted servants, the butler and the baker, had offended the king and were imprisoned in the same ward where Joseph was (v.3). The nature of their crime is not mentioned and so we do not know what it was, except that it was serious enough to incur the anger of the king and land them in prison. It is significant that they were put in the same prison ward where Joseph was, and not only that, Joseph was to take charge of them and ministered to them! Interestingly "the captain of the guard" assigned Joseph the special responsibility and duty to look after the two servants. In the previous chapter, Potiphar was designated as "the captain of the guard" (39:1). And it is probable that it was the same Potiphar, who "charged Joseph with them, and he served them" (v.4). That tells us that Potiphar might have known the truth about the alleged accusation against Joseph by his wife. Joseph was an upright man and in prison, he displayed consistently the same trustworthy, conscientious and competent self.

This contact between Joseph and both servants was providential in the eventual release and ascendancy of Joseph to the court of the king. If this connection which was part of a chain of events, did not happen, then Joseph would still be in prison or somewhere else. Nothing therefore happens by mere chance or luck. This happening was the turning point of Joseph's life.

¹ G.I. Williamson, *The Westminster Confession of Faith for Study Classes*, (Presbyterian and

Reformed Publishing Company, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, 1964), 46.

Joseph needed to learn a couple of things before God raised him to the second highest and most powerful position in Egypt. How wonderful it is to be in the will of God!

Who Can Interpret Dreams

One night, the butler and the baker dreamed a dream. They could relate the details of their dreams. Their dream was vivid to them. This is quite uncommon as most of us, if not all of us, do not remember all the details of our dreams. However, the next day, Joseph noticed that they were not looking their usual selves, in fact they were sad. When Joseph asked them what their problem was, they both admitted that they had a dream and there was no one to interpret their dreams. On hearing this, Joseph comforted them by declaring that the interpretation of dreams comes from God alone. Joseph requested them to tell him their dreams. Joseph made two points: that the meaning of dreams lies with God and not with “wise men and magicians”; and that God had given him the gift of interpreting dreams.

God spoke to Jacob in a dream (31:11).² And it is certain that the source of the dreams of the butler and baker was from God. We see that in the Old Testament, sometimes a dream is the means by which God would communicate with a person. But it must be cautioned that we should not give any importance to our dreams in the same vein as Joseph's response to the dreams of the two men. The writer to the Hebrews declares that in the past God spoke in various ways to the “fathers

² KJV Genesis 31:11 And the angel of God spake unto me in a dream, saying, Jacob: And I said, Here am I.

and prophets,” but “in these last days” has spoken to us by the Lord Jesus Christ (Hebrews 1:1, 2).³ And if there are some people who claim that they have a word from God through their dreams, their claims must be tested in the light of Scriptures. We need to test their claim against the truths, which are taught in Scripture (Deuteronomy 13:1-5).⁴ One more test is the moral influence they bring to bear—do they turn people to God or to something else.⁵ We should also heed the words of Solomon in his wisdom literature, “*For in the multitude of dreams and many words, there are also divers vanities (futility or emptiness): but fear God*” (Ecclesiastes 5:7). We should apply these tests to those who claim divine knowledge.

The important thing concerns Joseph's offer to interpret the dreams of the butler and baker (v.8b). Joseph had

³ KJV Hebrews 1:1 God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, 2 Hath in these last days spoken unto us by *his* Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds;

⁴ KJV Deuteronomy 13:1 If there arise among you a prophet, or a dreamer of dreams, and giveth thee a sign or a wonder, 2 And the sign or the wonder come to pass, whereof he spake unto thee, saying, Let us go after other gods, which thou hast not known, and let us serve them; 3 Thou shalt not hearken unto the words of that prophet, or that dreamer of dreams:

for the LORD your God proveth you, to know whether ye love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul. 4 Ye shall walk after the LORD your God, and fear him, and keep his commandments, and obey his voice, and ye shall serve him, and cleave unto him. 5 And that prophet, or that dreamer of dreams, shall be put to death; because he hath spoken to turn *you* away from the LORD your God, which brought you out of the land of Egypt, and redeemed you out of the house of bondage, to thrust thee out of the way which the LORD thy God commanded thee to walk in. So shalt thou put the evil away from the midst of thee.

⁵ Baldwin, p.170.

dreamt and interpreted his dreams. He had believed that God had revealed to him what would happen in the future concerning the destiny of himself and his family. Thus far, we have seen that Joseph did not waver from this conviction and faith in God that one day his brothers would bow to him. He still hoped and trusted in God in spite of the downward experiences in his life—each succeeding event brought him farther down and not up. He knew that he had this gift of interpreting dreams although he could see that his own dreams have not been realised or do not seem to be close to fulfilment. That speaks a lot about his steadfast faith and trust in God! What an example of faith, trust and hope in God!

Watch Out for Open Doors

The butler related his dream to Joseph. Joseph interpreted that in three days' time, Pharaoh would restore his position as his butler just as before (v.13). And Joseph seized the opportunity to ask him for a favour. Joseph implored him to show kindness by interceding on his behalf before Pharaoh so that he could be set free from prison for he had done nothing to deserve the imprisonment (vv.14, 15).

Joseph believed that his interpretation was accurate and what he had interpreted would come true. This we gather from the fact that he earnestly asked the butler to remember him and say a good word to Pharaoh on his behalf so that he could be released from prison. One should not see this request by Joseph as an indication of the waning or weakness of his faith. If that were so, then he would not ask the butler for the favour. Joseph was quick to see an opportunity opened to him to

get himself freed. While he trusted God that one day he would be vindicated, he saw an opening to effect his innocence. Why let this golden opportunity pass away. He did not engineer the circumstances. It happened to him. He recognised that God was giving him the chance to appeal his innocence. There is a fine balance between the providence of God and the responsibility of man. Joseph sets the example how we can exercise our responsibility in similar situations.

A beautiful part of Joseph's character is seen in his plea for freedom to the butler. Observe that he did not relate in detail how he landed in prison. He did not mention about his brothers, neither did he mention about Potiphar's wife. His chief concern was to be freed from prison where he was unjustly confined. Joseph did not consider it necessary to tell all the details. He was longsuffering towards those who mistreated him and injured him. What an example for many of us to follow. Often, we say more than necessary in such matters.

Always Tell the Truth Plainly

After hearing the favourable interpretation by Joseph of the butler's dream, the baker related his dream to Joseph. A common similarity of the two dreams is the number "three." And in both instances, the number three represent three days. In three days' time, Pharaoh shall "*lift up thy head from off thee; and shall hang thee on a tree*" (v.19).

Some have criticised Joseph for lack of compassion and tact when he told the baker what would happen to him. Would you be surprised if Joseph had

tampered with the interpretation and gave the baker a more favourable report? But that would be dishonest. And what would be worse, he would be a false “prophet”. No, Joseph handled the interpretation with the same care and accuracy as he had done to the butler. It was not for him to add or subtract what God had specially and specifically revealed to him. This is how we ought to handle the Word of God today—to tell plainly without tampering or changing the Word of God when we preach or teach it to others. God has already warned that there would be dire consequences upon those who tamper with His Word. Here is what God says to all those who handle His Word:

Deuteronomy 4:2 **Ye shall not add unto the word which I command you, neither shall ye diminish ought from it, that ye may keep the commandments of the LORD your God which I command you.**

God inspired the last Apostle John to declare these words concerning His prophecy:

Revelation 22:18 *For I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, **if any man shall add** unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book: 19 **And if any man shall take away** from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book.*

Joseph did exactly what God expected him to do—neither added nor took away any part of the prophecy, which God had revealed, to him. How important it

is for every Christian to study the Word of God diligently and when we handle it to be approved of God? We need to heed the injunction of Paul in his second epistle to young Timothy, “*Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth*” (2:15). And when we know the truth, we must without fear and favour of man, like Paul who exhorted the Corinthian Christians,

2 Corinthians 4:2 *But have renounced the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully; but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God.*

Joseph told the baker in the way, which was approved of God. He was plain honest and pulled no punches.

God's Word Is True

And it happened just as Joseph interpreted the dreams. The butler was restored and the baker was hanged. But there is a sad note. The butler forgot about Joseph. Imagine when Joseph saw the butler leaving the prison walls, he hoped that he too would soon join him—RELEASED! But the butler did not remember him. How ungrateful he was. We are not told why he forgot Joseph so soon. We can only guess for he is just like us, human: Did he suffer from temporary amnesia? Was he afraid of Pharaoh? Did he purposely decide to forget Joseph? Or was he so happy and satisfied with his lot that he did not think of helping others, not even Joseph? The fact that the Word of God report this attitude of the butler means that God

does not want His children to be like the butler—an attitude of ingratitude. Did not our Lord Jesus Christ asked the Samaritan leper, “Were there not ten cleansed” but where are the nine?”⁶ This teaching is sober. How have we shown our gratefulness to the Lord Jesus Christ? He had given all for us? How much have we given Him?

SUMMARY

Christians are bought with the precious blood of the Lord Jesus Christ.⁷ We belong to God and as His children; His providential care is always upon us. We can be sure of that. Nothing therefore happens to a child of God by chance. Like Joseph, if we are experiencing troubles and tribulations, they are meant for our good. We need to examine ourselves with the aid of Scripture to find out what God is teaching or training us. If we are humble and submit to His will, the eventual end is always good and beneficial, in fact more than we can expect.⁸

We should not allow bitterness to set in our hearts because someone has treated us unjustly. Neither should we become vindictive and seek to get even. In such circumstances, we need to be

⁶ KJV Luke 17:17 And Jesus answering said, Were there not ten cleansed? but where *are* the nine?

⁷ KJV Acts 20:28 Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood.

KJV 1 Corinthians 7:23 Ye are bought with a price; be not ye the servants of men.

⁸ KJV Romans 8:28 And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to *his* purpose.

patient and remain faithful to the Lord. A period of waiting would allow time to mould our character. It is only in time of difficulties that our true colours are revealed, and that opens the opportunity for change for the better. Corrie ten Boom says, “When you are dying, you see things from a different perspective than when you think you may live for a long time.” AMEN

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DAILY READINGS & DISCUSSION

QUESTIONS

Daily Readings

Monday: Genesis 40:1-4; Psalm 105:16-22; Romans 8:17-28.

Tuesday: Genesis 40:5-8; Proverbs 3:1-12; Ephesians 4:31-32.

Wednesday: Genesis 40:9-15; Titus 3:1-4; 1 Peter 3:8-12.

Thursday: Genesis 40:16-19; Acts 26:19-29.

Friday: Genesis 40:20-23; Revelation 22:6-13; Psalm 27:14.

Discussion Questions

1. What did God do and allow it to happen in verses 1-4?

2. If the "captain of the guard" was Potiphar, what do we learn about his action here?

3. What attitude did Joseph show towards his fellow prisoners?

4. What attitude did Joseph display towards God?

5. Describe the butler's dream and its interpretation.

6. What favour did Joseph ask of the butler? Do you think that Joseph's trust in God was wavering?

7. What are the similarities between the baker's dream and that of the butler? What was the interpretation of the baker's dream?

8. They were sad that there was no one to interpret their dreams. What do you think of the baker's feelings and thoughts after Joseph interpreted his dream?

9. What were the results of Joseph's interpretation of the dreams?

10. What do the results tell us about dreams and God?

11. What was the result for Joseph? What character trait was God forming in him?

12. What do you think made Joseph calm and composed, and hopeful when things so far had worked unfairly against him?
