

“...interpretations belong to God...”

It is a truism that Christians who obey God and who do His bidding will often know trouble in this world, even to being put into prison or suffering the wrongful onslaught of the law. But, the real core of this chapter is not what happened to Joseph, but that God has the keys to truth.

How many preachers, denominations, or others, claim to know the truth denied to others, and demand obedience to themselves on that basis? Too many! Paul demanded obedience not to his own words, but to the words given to him by God and insofar as they agreed with words already known. In modern days, those who preach or teach may only seek obedience to words given by God, and any they utter must be in accord with scripture. That is, obedience is not to the man or the preacher, but to what God says.

The word belongs to God, as does the meaning, which is plain and observably true. Genuine prophecies always come true at a time specified, and interpretations are always correct in every jot and tittle. One ‘prophetic ministry’ collects thousands of so-called ‘prophecies’ from anywhere in the world, all of which are personal fantasies. Some are put on the front page and others are archived, to be used later!

The purpose of all this? To make a lot of money! The ‘best’ prophecies are sold off as CD’s, tapes, videos, or books. There are conferences, workshops... the usual charismatic nonsense. And many of the ‘prophecies’ are not even fresh, but old, stored away in boxes and used when they might fit a particular angle, sometimes years later. (We know this because an ex-manager of the fake ‘ministry’ told us). And just about every ‘prophecy’ is billed as ‘awesome’!! Many pages are devoted to ‘teaching’ gullible subscribers how to be prophetic, how to interpret, how to see ‘awesome’ changes in their lives! Special ‘kits’ are sold to protect homes from the devil – looking for all the world like something from a Dracula film, including stakes and holy oil!

When a situation is genuine, God speaks quietly to a man and, sometimes, another may interpret. All will be orderly and the results will always be fully accurate. This is because *God*, not a man, is in charge of what He says! All preachers and teachers must resist the temptation to rely only on their own intelligence or previous spiritual successes. Every day brings its own challenges and needs, and God gives the answers singularly, not in bulk! It means that we must look to God every moment for His plan and actions. There are no standing orders. Scripture gives us the basic foundation and boundaries, but we must always look to God daily for answers, even if He sends us back again to the same foundations and boundaries.

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Never assume that the answer will always be the same. In this way we acknowledge that all of life is in His hands and not in our own. We can plan our lives generally, but should not assume that this is where God will take us every day. He might wish to deviate from the path we think we should take, and we must accept the changes, for He knows best.

Verses 1-4

1.

“And it came to pass after these things, that the butler of the king of Egypt and his baker had offended their lord the king of Egypt.

2.

And Pharaoh was wroth against two of his officers, against the chief of the butlers, and against the chief of the bakers.

3.

And he put them in ward in the house of the captain of the guard, into the prison, the place where Joseph was bound.

4.

And the captain of the guard charged Joseph with them, and he served them: and they continued a season in ward.”

Sometime after being imprisoned and gaining the respect and favour of the prison captain, Joseph was involved in the interpretation of dreams.

The butler and baker who worked for the pharaoh (again referred to as the ‘king of Egypt’) had ‘offended’ him. The butler or *shaqah* was the person who took drink to the pharaoh; he was a ‘cup bearer’. The word ‘baker’ is self-explanatory. Both were ‘chief’ at their jobs,

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or overseers, and had done or said something pharaoh did not like. The word used for

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'offended' is the same as for 'sin'. In this case it does not bear the same meaning as sin against God, but simply means to do or say something another person does not like.

Very often, people offend each other, but the offence may not be an offence against God. Sometimes, the problem is the wrong handling of a rule, or the breaching of a tradition, or just that the other person is unduly sensitive. There are times when laws are written that contradict God's laws. In which case, though they might be humanly illegal they are morally sound in God's eyes. These kinds of laws are proliferating in today's world, because so few people understand what morality is. Sadly, these same people, who never fight against injustice, accept any nonsense put their way, with the excuse that it does not affect them. In reality they do not care.

So, the chief butler and chief baker were imprisoned because of something they may have done to offend pharaoh. We do not know if this was genuine, or just a fit of temper on the part of pharaoh. He put them in 'ward', *mishmar*, prison; it is also called the 'house of the captain of the guard'. An architectural note is that the prison may well have been round in structure, as the word 'prison' suggests - '*cohor*', roundhouse, or house of roundness. It was also the place where Joseph was kept.

The prison keeper handed over these two new prisoners to Joseph for guarding. He was also responsible for tending to their needs and feeding, etc., as 'serving' tells us – *sharath*, 'to minister' or to serve. There they stayed for a 'season' or period of time.

Verses 5-8

1.

"And they dreamed a dream both of them, each man his dream in one night, each man according to the interpretation of his dream, the butler and the baker of the king of Egypt, which were bound in the prison.

2.

And Joseph came in unto them in the morning, and looked upon them, and, behold, they were sad.

3.

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And he asked Pharaoh's officers that were with him in the ward of his lord's house, saying, Wherefore look ye so sadly to day?

4.

And they said unto him, We have dreamed a dream, and there is no interpreter of it. And Joseph said unto them, Do not interpretations belong to God? tell me them, I pray you."

At some time into their sentence, both the men had dreams on the same night. Next morning when Joseph entered their cell he could see they were sad, and asked them for the reason. They told him they had had dreams but did not know the meaning.

Then, Joseph said something that was remarkable, using the word '*pithrown*' for 'interpretation'. This is rooted in *pa*
thar
, meaning 'interpretation of dreams'. He said "Do not interpretations belong to God? Tell me them, I pray you."

This is remarkable because he knew immediately that God would give him the meaning of the dreams, saying that such belongs to God. The statement tells us that Joseph was claiming to have the ear of God. In modern times thousands of charismatics claim the very same things, but their 'dreams' and 'interpretations' are false. Yet, they are big business!

One 'prophetic ministry' stores thousands of so-called 'prophecies', several years old, and often publishes them as though they were current, especially if they appear to 'fit' this or that news item! Along the way they accrue massive financial gains. In other words, they cheat, and their followers are gullible enough to listen and pay! Is it fraud?

The true future-prophecy is specific and *always* occurs. The true interpreter will *always* be totally and fully accurate, and any times or dates will be fulfilled to the letter. With Joseph there was no hesitation. This can only have happened because God filled him with faith that what he said was true. And this could only have come about because God, through the Holy Spirit, told him inwardly what to say,

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Verses 9-15

1.

“And the chief butler told his dream to Joseph, and said to him, In my dream, behold, a vine was before me;

2.

And in the vine were three branches: and it was as though it budded, and her blossoms shot forth; and the clusters thereof brought forth ripe grapes:

3.

And Pharaoh's cup was in my hand: and I took the grapes, and pressed them into Pharaoh's cup, and I gave the cup into Pharaoh's hand.

4.

And Joseph said unto him, This is the interpretation of it: The three branches are three days:

5.

Yet within three days shall Pharaoh lift up thine head, and restore thee unto thy place: and thou shalt deliver Pharaoh's cup into his hand, after the former manner when thou wast his butler.

6.

But think on me when it shall be well with thee, and shew kindness, I pray thee, unto me, and make mention of me unto Pharaoh, and bring me out of this house:

7.

For indeed I was stolen away out of the land of the Hebrews: and here also have I done nothing that they should put me into the dungeon.”

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The butler related his dream to Joseph. You will note that unlike ordinary dreams which can be confused and forgotten, a dream given by God for the purpose of prophecy, is remembered in detail.

I will not go into the dream simply because there is no way a reader could interpret what it means by human deduction. Only Joseph was given the meaning, which was that pharaoh would relent and take the butler back into service in the palace within the next three days.

Joseph then asked the butler to remember him when he was released, and to remind Pharaoh that he was still in prison, and wished for freedom. He quickly told the butler how he got to be in prison, through no fault of his own. As has already been said, Christians can fall foul of many human laws, rules of society, and individuals, just by being faithful to God, or by doing nothing at all. This indicates that the unsaved have an inner hatred for God's people.

There are Christians who claim that if we find ourselves in a 'hard place' we should just sit back and accept it readily, making suffering a virtue. Whilst it is true that we should bear up under such strain, there is no hard and fast rule that says Christians must be passive or lay down and be stamped upon. Here, Joseph plainly asked another man to get him out of prison. Obviously, God would need to work on the heart of pharaoh anyway, but the point being made is that Joseph took the first opportunity to seek his freedom, and did not sit back and accept his 'fate', to suffer needlessly.

Verses 16-19

1.

"When the chief baker saw that the interpretation was good, he said unto Joseph, I also was in my dream, and, behold, I had three white baskets on my head:

2.

And in the uppermost basket there was of all manner of bakemeats for Pharaoh; and the birds did eat them out of the basket upon my head.

3.

And Joseph answered and said, This is the interpretation thereof: The three baskets are three days:

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4.

Yet within three days shall Pharaoh lift up thy head from off thee, and shall hang thee on a tree; and the birds shall eat thy flesh from off thee.”

Taking heart at the good news, the chief baker thought that his interpretation would also be good and favourable, and so told Joseph *his* dream. Sadly, the meaning for him was disastrous... within three days pharaoh would order him to be hanged on a tree, where birds would eat his body. Again, there is no way any human being could give a meaning to the baker's dream. It had to come from God.

Verses 20-23

1.

“And it came to pass the third day, which was Pharaoh's birthday, that he made a feast unto all his servants: and he lifted up the head of the chief butler and of the chief baker among his servants.

2.

And he restored the chief butler unto his butlership again; and he gave the cup into Pharaoh's hand:

3.

But he hanged the chief baker: as Joseph had interpreted to them.

4.

Yet did not the chief butler remember Joseph, but forgat him.”

The third day after the dreams it was pharaoh's birthday and he decided to celebrate with a banquet for all his servants. He 'lifted up the head' of the butler and the baker, meaning that he

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freed them from prison. But, only the butler would live to enjoy it. He was restored to his old job, but the baker was hanged. Despite the fact that Joseph had asked the butler to remember him to pharaoh, the butler forgot, so Joseph had more time to serve before he could know freedom.

We must never forget those who help us. In Christian terms, we should not forget those who give us spiritual help, which is what Joseph gave to the two men.

The account also shows us that God gives men (and women) dreams and visions on occasions. From my experience these appear to be rare. They are often one-off experiences, just as healing is a one-off experience. When some insist they have a 'gift' for this and claim to have dreams and visions all the time, be wary! A dream or vision from God is given for a very specific reason... Joseph's dreams are a good example, there being many years between the dreams he told to his family and these two dreams in prison. A dream or vision must have an interpretation, for it to have any worth and meaning. And any interpretation must come true in every detail.

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