

The Family of Abraham - Part 30—The Butler and the Baker's Dreams

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Preacher: Alastair Roberts

[0 : 00] Welcome back to this, the 30th in my series on the story of the family of Abraham. Today we're looking at chapter 40 of the book of Genesis, which concerns the dreams of the chief butler and the chief baker and Joseph's interpretation of them.

The story begins with Joseph in the prison. He's been put there as a result of Potiphar's wife's false accusation. And this prison belongs to the chief of the guard, who we've seen earlier is Potiphar. Is it still Potiphar? Quite probably. He's placed in this prison, but yet he rises within the prison. The keeper of the guard or the keeper of the prison has put everything under his oversight.

Even other prisoners, he's looking after their well-being, ensuring that they're doing well. This is the king's prison. So it's the prison where the king places his own prisoners as well. It's a prison for people of status. These are royal officials.

Now, the characters of the butler and the baker, it's important. These are royal officials. They're performing important tasks. They're providing for the food of Pharaoh.

[1 : 06] And so there is a crisis in the king's provision of food. And it starts out at the very outset with they have both offended the king in some way, offended Pharaoh.

And there needs to be something about their situation dealt with. So you've got the chief butler, the chief person in charge of the wine, and then the chief baker, the one who does all the pastries and the pleasant breads of the palace.

And maybe oversees the wider work of bread making within the royal oversight of the nation.

Now, these are important roles. These aren't just regular servants within the king's household do menial tasks. These are officials who probably have ritual tasks to perform in state occasions, maybe also occasions of religious feasts, things like that.

These are figures also who are of symbolic importance, bread and wine. We think of that in terms of the Eucharist, but beyond the Eucharist, there is great symbolism given to bread and wine throughout the Old Testament.

[2 : 16] We've already seen Melchizedek in chapter 14, who brings out bread and wine to Abraham after the defeat of the kings. There are other occasions where we see bread and wine as a pairing.

We maybe connect it with the tribute offering, with the memorial grain offering, and then also the grain offering and then the drink offering.

Or we could think about it in terms of Lady Wisdom's feast. She lays out bread and wine. So these are important elements, as it were.

Elements that suggest that these characters stand for something more than just random servants of Pharaoh. There is a food crisis. And this food crisis is the fact that there is no one by Pharaoh's side to serve in the oversight of the preparation and provision of food in these capacities.

And so it's set up for events that will happen later. Maybe this is helping us to see what Joseph will ultimately do. Who will become the big baker of Egypt, the one who oversees the provision of bread?

[3 : 25] Joseph himself. Who will be the man who ultimately holds the cup, is associated with the cup? It's Joseph, as we'll see in later chapters. So maybe we're seeing something here that sets up the character of Joseph.

A food crisis in Egypt, a crisis in the service of Pharaoh, and he does not have good enough people by his side. Who is going to fill those slots?

The two dreams happen to two persons, but they happen on the same night, and they're paired dreams. As we've gone through the story of Joseph, we should have noticed these pairings. And I've mentioned this before in the previous video, that there are pairings of twins. Things Perez and Zerah, for instance, or Esau and Jacob. There are pairings of Joseph and Judah. There are pairings of two temptation scenes with Potiphar's wife. Other sorts of pairings that we find within these chapters. Two visits of the brothers. Two times where the Egyptians ask for bread.

[4 : 33] And these sorts of occasions, I think, suggest these twos are significant. But perhaps most significant in the context of the dreams. As we look in chapter 37, and then in chapter 40, as we're looking at here, and then in chapter 41, there are three sets of two dreams.

And in each case, the two dreams correspond to a single reality. So in the first case, it's the elevation of Joseph above his brothers.

In the second case, here in this chapter, it's what Pharaoh will do in reordering his house at the time of his birthday and the different fates that these two characters will face.

And then in the third one, it's the two dreams concerning the famine that's about to come. So two witnesses, as it were, two witnesses to a single reality.

So again, the pairings are important. And these dreams are not just disconnected. As we read the stories of the dreams, we need to read them alongside and in dialogue with each other.

[5 : 37] There are things that thematically connect these things. They have this dream and these dreams and they're downcast. And the way that they're downcast brings Joseph's attention to them.

Now, I'm not sure what to make of it. But one of the other occasions where we do have people being downcast and having that being noticed is in the story of Nehemiah, which is an interesting parallel.

It came to pass in the month of Nisan in the 20th year of King Artaxerxes, when wine was before him, that I took the wine and I gave it to the king. Now, I had never been sad in his presence before. Therefore, the king said to me, why is your face sad since you are not sick? This is nothing but sorrow of heart. Then I became dreadfully afraid. So we have a similar thing here.

And once again, it's in relationship to a king. It's someone being downcast. It's in the context of presenting wine to the king as the chief butler.

[6 : 40] Now, reading those parallels maybe suggests that we're supposed to see some connection between or the character of the chief butler maybe helps us to read the character of Nehemiah.

I'm not sure. There quite probably is something there. As we read through the stories of Daniel or the story of Nehemiah or the story of Mordecai, we see all these people in foreign courts rising up to positions of influence and importance alongside the king.

And there are all sorts of Joseph themes. So if you read the story of Mordecai, there are lots of Joseph themes in his story. I didn't mention this in the previous video on the story.

But if you look at Esther chapter 3, verse 3 to 4, Haman has said that everyone should bow before him, etc.

That is an interesting parallel with an expression we hardly, we really don't find elsewhere in scripture.

[8 : 00] But we see in chapter 39, where in chapter 39 it says, So it was as she spoke to Joseph day by day that he did not heed her to lie with her or to be with her.

So maybe these two stories help us to read. Maybe the story of Joseph helps us to read the story of Mordecai. I might comment upon that at the very end of this series.

Some of the parallels between this story and later stories in scripture. And how we're helped to read, for instance, the story of David by reading the story of Joseph. Or the story of Mordecai and Esther.

Or the story of Daniel. Again, someone who interprets dreams and is raised up to the position of second in the kingdom. Or, as I've mentioned, maybe even the story of Nehemiah.

But those connections are weaker. So we have two sets of dreams. And then we have these twin characters. One who maybe has a very negative fate.

[8 : 59] One who has a very positive fate. But they seem very similar. Their fates are intertwined in some ways. And their stories are very alike. Their dreams. The dream of the butler is given as follows.

Behold, in my dream, a vine was before me. And in the vine were three branches. It was as though it budded. Its blossoms shut forth. And its clusters brought forth ripe grapes. Then Pharaoh's cup was in my hand.

And I took the grapes and pressed them into Pharaoh's cup. And placed the cup in Pharaoh's hand. Now, when you read this story, this account, you should notice that there are three sets of three. So the first set of three is the three branches. Then the next set of three is the budding, blossoms shooting forth, and clusters bringing forth ripe grapes.

The three stages in the growth of the grapes. And then the final one is the actions. The threefold action. Cup being in his hand. Taking the grapes.

[10:00] So he's got the cup in his hand. And then he performs three actions. He takes the grapes. He presses them into Pharaoh's cup. And then he places the cup in Pharaoh's hand. And so three sets of threes.

And then, of course, the number three is very important in the interpretation of the dream. Which Joseph gives. Now, within three days, Pharaoh will lift up your head and restore you to your place. And you will put Pharaoh's cup in his hand according to the former manner when you were his butler. Now, this is a very... I mean, once you've worked out that the three corresponds to days, then it makes sense.

Now, why would it make sense that it's days? Well, you can see the growth of the tree. There's a temporal sequence here. Three-stage sequence. But then, presumably, Pharaoh...

I presume that Joseph knows it's Pharaoh's birthday in three days' time. And it's a big state occasion. And there are these seats that are empty. The seat of the chief butler and the chief baker.

[11:04] Who's going to fill those seats? Something has to be done. This is a crunch time.

Something has to be... Their situations have to be addressed by that point. Now, presumably, as the butler and the baker...

These were important royal officials. They weren't just regular guys. Common criminals. Nor were they rebels. I mean, if they were rebels, they would have been put to death straight away. But these are figures who have offended the king in some way.

And now their situations have to be dealt with more decisively. There has to be a final sentence declared upon them. And so the butler is going to be raised up to his former position.

And those three days correspond, I presume. Joseph knows that there's this big state occasion coming up. And live in a civilized country where you do celebrate the monarch's birthday.

And, I mean, we had the birthday of Her Majesty the Queen a few days ago. We didn't celebrate it widely. It's not her official birthday. But in a civilized country, you celebrate these things. And so you need all the people in their proper slots for that occasion.

[12:08] Presumably, there are rituals and other things to perform. And if you do not have everyone there, then there's a problem. There are people who are not present to oversee certain tasks.

If you don't have the chief baker or the chief butler, who's going to oversee the preparation of certain aspects of the provisions? Or who's going to oversee the broader work of the king's vineyards?

Or whatever it is. There are tasks that these characters would have been formed that would have been very significant. Probably ceremonial and sometimes religious as well in character.

And they would also have access to the king. They would have status and standing in court. We think about the character of Nehemiah, who could talk to the king concerning his concerns. He had the ear of the king.

He was very close to the king. And so the person who's providing the wine of the king has access to the king. And presumably has quite a number of people under his oversight.

[13:03] This is an important official. But it also suggests there's a food crisis. That the pharaoh does not have the right servants that he needs.

And these servants are in charge of bread and wine. They're in charge of these provisions that have sacramental significance. So the Eucharistic connections is talk about Melchizedek bringing out bread and wine.

Or Lady Wisdom's feast, bread and wine. The various sacrifices with the drink and the meal offering. All these sorts of things. These roles were important. And ultimately, Joseph will be the chief baker of Egypt.

He'll be the chief, the one who's overseeing all the production of bread. He'll be the one who is the one who has the cup as well. So this has some relevance to Joseph's own experience.

When we see that he recognizes it's three days. They'll be lifted up. That character will be lifted up. His head will be lifted up. Which means the king will take notice of him.

[14:05] Raise him back to his former status. And at that point, he wants him to put in a word for him. Says, I've been put in this dungeon or this pit. Again, notice the word. It's a pit.

It's not just a dungeon. It's the same word as we have for the earlier place that he was put into by his brothers. He's put in another pit at this point. And so he wants the butler to put in a word for him when he comes before the king.

Now, the chief baker sees that there's a positive interpretation of his comrade's dream. And so their dreams are very similar. Why not just tell him my dream and ask him what my dream means?

Of course, tells him his dream and his dream is not such a pleasant one. I also was in my dream. And there I had three white baskets on my head. In the uppermost basket, there were all kinds of baked goods for Pharaoh.

And the birds ate them out of the basket on my head. So Joseph answered and said, this is the interpretation of it. The three baskets are three days. Within three days, Pharaoh will lift off your head from you and hang you on a tree.

[15:14] And the birds will eat your flesh from you. So it's a very, very unpleasant interpretation to the dream. But again, it follows the themes of the dream.

There's the three baskets, three days on his head. And so he's taken up. His head is taken up. And the butler sees a vine before him, a tree before him.

This man will be hung upon the tree. And the birds will eat the flesh off him, much as the birds eat the bread. Now, we can see some interesting connections there.

But we might get back to those in a moment. Came to pass on the third day, which was Pharaoh's birthday. So he knows this event is coming up, presumably. There's a bit of a murmur around the prison that this event is coming up.

And maybe the butler and the baker are aware of this forthcoming event. They know it's significant. They know that something has to happen by that point. Their cases will have some attention given to them by that time.

[16:20] So presumably they know something is in the offing. And one way or another, their cases will be decided. And so he does have a clue, I think, concerning what the threes refer to.

It's not three years. It's three days. He lifts up the head of the chief butler and the chief baker among his servants. So there's a parallel.

These are twins. They both have their heads lifted up. But the butler has his head lifted up by being restored to his butlership again and placing the cup in Pharaoh's hand.

But the baker has his head lifted up by being hung. And so there are similarities, but great juxtaposition as well. These are twins, but twins that are polarised twins, as we've seen in chapter 38.

There are two twins there again, and there's rivalry between twins in the story of Esau and Jacob. These are two twins and they have different fates. Now, there are some natural connections to draw here between this story and the story of Christ.

[17:32] The story of Christ is also one where themes of bread and wine are very important. There's the comparison of bread to flesh or the relationship between bread and flesh.

Now, where else do we find that in Scripture? We find it here. We find it here when it talks about the birds eating his flesh compared to the birds eating the bread.

And so there's already biblical precedent for that parallel. And there are other things to notice.

There are two criminals alongside Joseph in the prison.

Two criminals being punished alongside him. One will be lifted up and one will be hung upon a tree and judged. And so you have two people hung alongside him.

One on the right, one on the left. One is going to be raised up, will be with him in paradise. And the other will be judged. So I think it's not wrong to see some parallels here.

[18:30] There's not wrong to see. Maybe we can see ways in which Jesus is like Joseph. We've already mentioned some of these, that Jesus is like Joseph in being, having his brothers seek to destroy him or being betrayed by Judah or Judas.

And can think about other ways in which he's similar. False accusations. The removal of a garment from him. The fact that he's raised up out of the pit. All these connections and brought to the right hand of power and becomes one who saves his brethren and gives bread of life to people.

So these connections jump out at us. But they're not explicitly mentioned within the text. I think this shows us that you don't have to have these things mentioned in the text.

The New Testament mentions some of these connections. But it presumes you're going to get the rest. It gives you some worked examples. But you're supposed to see the parallels with the story of Daniel or the story of Samson or the story of Joseph or the story of Jacob.

These connections are there. You're just supposed to learn how to do it from the way the apostles do it. And as you learn how they do it in the story of, well Christ does it in the story of Jonah or the story of Joshua or the story of David.

[19 : 46] You fill these pictures out and you add more of your own as you look through the scriptures. These things are there because scripture ultimately is all an itinerary leading us to Christ.

Christ is the one who fulfills all of these themes. Now I've just done a video or a talk for the latest Theopolis podcast in which I go through the four resurrections in the story of Joseph.

So I highly recommend that you listen to that if you want to see these themes developed a bit more all in one place. Showing you how these resurrection themes play out.

But if you don't have time for that you will see some of these themes as I go through this story. And at the end I may sum some of them up. So you have two pair dreams here and that sets us up for what happens in the next chapter.

The butler is restored to his former office. He forgets entirely about Joseph. But I think within these dreams there is also a message for Joseph.

[20 : 50] We have three days until the butler and the baker will have their heads raised up. When does Joseph have these things happen to him?

And then you have his first birthday celebration here as it were, Pharaoh's first.

And then you have his second and then you have the end of the next year is his third. So maybe it's the third day that he's being raised or the third year that he's being raised up.

Again three days are important within these stories. We'll see three days in prison later on in the story of Joseph. And obvious comparisons with the story of Christ there.

Joseph is going to be raised up on that third birthday of Pharaoh. Maybe there's something there. I'm not sure. It's the third day. Maybe. But interesting connection if it is.

[21 : 48] Thank you very much for listening. Lord willing I'll be back again tomorrow with further discussion of this or maybe an answer to a question. If you have any questions that you would like me to answer on this or anything else please leave them on my Curious Cat account.

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And it's a great encouragement as well. It helps me to know that I'm not just doing this myself.

There are people who are invested in what I'm doing and making it possible and interested.

[22 : 52] And I also love the comments as well. There are some people who have left some great thoughts and engagement with what I've said. Who have sent me emails and other things like that. All of that is greatly appreciated.

Thank you so much for your time. Lord willing see you again tomorrow. God bless. God bless.