

Introduction

What is going to happen in the future?

Most people are fascinated with, and yet a little fearful about, future things. We are fascinated to know about our personal future, yet we can become fearful when we consider the prophetic future of the human race and of our planet.

Our text in Genesis is about the future - both personal and prophetic. God gave men His Word on the future in the form of dreams. Joseph was called upon to interpret the personal future of two prisoners, and he was called upon to interpret the prophetic future of Pharaoh's Egypt.

Today, God has given all men His Word on the future in written form - in the Bible. It is the final and authoritative information about both the personal future and the prophetic future:

^ Concerning your *personal future*...

In the Bible God reveals the destinations of all men, women, and children after this life, and the decision that determines your personal destiny.

%o Concerning the *prophetic future*...

In the Bible God reveals Himself as the sovereign Lord of human history, both past, present, and prophetic. At least 25% of the Bible is dedicated to a discussion of the course of future events and the culmination of history. Tomorrow's national and international headlines are already written in the prophetic portions of Holy Scripture!

Joseph was called upon to interpret the personal future of two prisoners, and he was called upon to interpret the prophetic future of Pharaoh's Egypt. *You* might be called upon to do the same! Not for the butler and baker of Egypt, and not for Pharaoh - but for family, friends, neighbors, and co-workers who are both fascinated with their own personal future and fearful of the prophetic future.

#1 You Might Be Called Upon To Interpret
The Personal Future That God Has
Revealed To Men In His Word
(39:21 - 40:23)

The immediate, personal future of the butler and the baker of Pharaoh's court are the concern of the opening verses. Any curiosity they might have had about the prophetic future of Egypt was overshadowed by their own immediate circumstances. God gave them His Word, in the form of dreams, to reveal their personal futures.

Genesis 39:21 But the LORD was with Joseph and showed him mercy, and He gave him favor in the sight of the keeper of the prison.

Genesis 39:22 And the keeper of the prison committed to Joseph's hand all the prisoners who *were* in the prison; whatever they did there, it was his doing.

Genesis 39:23 The keeper of the prison did not look into anything *that was* under *Joseph's* authority, because the LORD was with him; and whatever he did, the LORD made *it* prosper.

Joseph determined to represent his God even as a prisoner. What was his secret? The verses say, "the Lord was with Joseph...the Lord was with him." An awareness of the presence of Jesus Christ in your life is the beginning of your success as a witness...

The presence of God is not all you need, however. Even with an awareness of the presence of God you sometimes grow weary in well doing. There is something else to see in these verses.

Three times your attention is called to the phrase "the keeper of the prison," once in each verse. Just as these prisoners had someone to "keep" them, so the Bible tells you as a believer that *you* are "kept" by the power of God in your walk with Him:

1 Peter 1:3 Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,

1 Peter 1:4 to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you,

1 Peter 1:5 who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

Jude 1:1 Jude, a bondservant of Jesus Christ, and brother of James, To those who are called, sanctified by God the Father, and preserved in Jesus Christ...

Jude 1:20 But you, beloved, building yourselves up on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit,

Jude 1:21 keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life...

Jude 1:24 Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, And to present *you* faultless Before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy,

Joseph was aware of God's presence. He was also aware of God's power to keep and preserve him - despite his outward circumstances to the contrary. These two truths, taken together, are the key to Joseph's success as God's witness.

How do you appropriate the precious truth that God is preserving you despite your outward circumstances? The same verses that promise you God's keeping power tell you how to appropriate it. Both Peter and Jude speak of God's preserving you and they *also* speak of your perseverance. Peter says you are "kept by the power of God through faith"; Jude says God is able to keep you, and that you are to "keep yourself in the love of God." You appropriate the keeping power of God as you discipline yourself and determine to *persevere* in the Christian life, despite the outward circumstances! God's promise and power to keep you does not relieve you of your personal responsibility to persevere in your daily walk.

God is able to preserve you. You have a responsibility to persevere. That's why over the doorway of his Pastor's College in London Charles Spurgeon affixed the words, "Holding, I am held."

Alexander Maclaren wrote,

"...abide in Christ...live in constant exercise of faith in Christ and grip Him so close and sure that the world, the flesh, and the devil cannot make us loosen our fingers. Then He will hold us up, and His great purpose, which brought Him to earth and nailed Him to the cross, will be fulfilled in us; and at last, we shall lift up our voices of wondering praise "to Him Who is able to keep us from falling, and to present us faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy."¹

Genesis 40:1 It came to pass after these things *that* the butler and the baker of the king of Egypt offended their lord, the king of Egypt.

Genesis 40:2 And Pharaoh was angry with his two officers, the chief butler and the chief baker.

Genesis 40:3 So he put them in custody in the house of the captain of the guard, in the prison, the place where Joseph *was* confined.

Genesis 40:4 And the captain of the guard charged Joseph with them, and he served them; so they were in custody for a while.

Joseph's prison was the place of God's providence. Joseph had an appointment with the butler and with the baker of Pharaoh that would change the course of human history. His office just happened to be a jail!

If you are seeking the will of God, you can be confident that your circumstances are the place of God's providence in your life. Your "office" is anywhere God has sovereignly placed you. You have divine appointments to keep that can change the courses of human hearts...

Genesis 40:5 Then the butler and the baker of the king of Egypt, who *were* confined in the prison, had a dream, both of them, each man's dream in one night *and* each man's dream with its *own* interpretation.

Genesis 40:6 And Joseph came in to them in the morning and looked at them, and saw that they *were* sad.

Genesis 40:7 So he asked Pharaoh's officers who *were* with him in the custody of his lord's house, saying, "Why do you look so sad today?"

Genesis 40:8 And they said to him, "We each have had a dream, and *there is* no interpreter of it." So Joseph said to them, "Do not interpretations belong to God? Tell *them* to me, please."

These dreams were from the Lord. God was troubling the hearts of these unbelieving men, through circumstances and through conviction.

^ Their circumstances were such that they thought they had a secure future in the world. Apparently a plot to poison Pharaoh had been discovered. The butler, who poured Pharaoh's drink, and the baker, who prepared his food, were the prime suspects.

¹quoted in *Life In The Son* (Shank), p. 283.

‰ They were also being convicted by God the Holy Spirit through the Word they received in the form of dreams.

God can and does do this today. He interferes in the circumstances of unbelievers to bring them to a place where they can come under the conviction of the Word. Then he has you in a providential relationship with them so that you can interpret their circumstances and their conviction as His efforts to draw them to the Savior.

Genesis 40:9 Then the chief butler told his dream to Joseph, and said to him, "Behold, in my dream a vine *was* before me,

Genesis 40:10 "and in the vine *were* three branches; it *was* as though it budded, its blossoms shot forth, and its clusters brought forth ripe grapes.

Genesis 40:11 "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."

Genesis 40:12 And Joseph said to him, "This *is* the interpretation of it: The three branches *are* three days.

Genesis 40:13 "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.

Genesis 40:14 "But remember me when it is well with you, and please show kindness to me; make mention of me to Pharaoh, and get me out of this house.

Genesis 40:15 "For indeed I was stolen away from the land of the Hebrews; and also I have done nothing here that they should put me into the dungeon."

Genesis 40:16 When the chief baker saw that the interpretation was good, he said to Joseph, "I also *was* in my dream, and there *were* three white baskets on my head.

Genesis 40:17 "In the uppermost basket *were* all kinds of baked goods for Pharaoh, and the birds ate them out of the basket on my head."

Genesis 40:18 So Joseph answered and said, "This *is* the interpretation of it: The three baskets *are* three days.

Genesis 40:19 "Within three days Pharaoh will lift off your head from you and hang you on a tree; and the birds will eat your flesh from you."

Genesis 40:20 Now it came to pass on the third day, *which was* Pharaoh's birthday, that he made a feast for all his servants; and he lifted up the head of the chief butler and of the chief baker among his servants.

Genesis 40:21 Then he restored the chief butler to his butlership again, and he placed the cup in Pharaoh's hand.

Genesis 40:22 But he hanged the chief baker, as Joseph had interpreted to them.

Genesis 40:23 Yet the chief butler did not remember Joseph, but forgot him.

Joseph interprets the dreams and reveals the personal future of each man. One, the butler, would live as a servant to Pharaoh and be rewarded in his kingdom. The other, the baker, would die as a criminal and be rejected from his kingdom.

God called upon Joseph to interpret the personal future that He had revealed to these men in His Word to them. You might be called upon to do the same!

God has revealed in the Bible the personal future of all men. Like the butler and the baker, there are two very different destinies and destinations awaiting men.

^ The personal future of believers is very different from the personal future of unbelievers...

When the earthly life of a believer ends, a glorious eternity begins. In 2 Corinthians 5:8 you read, "We are confident, yes, well pleased rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord." The moment you experience physical death your spirit is alive and conscious in the presence of Jesus Christ in heaven. In time, your spirit will be reunited with a glorified, resurrection body:

1 Corinthians 15:42 So also is the resurrection of the dead. *The body* is sown in corruption, it is raised in incorruption.

1 Corinthians 15:43 It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power.

1 Corinthians 15:44 It is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body.

Some Christians will never experience physical death:

1 Corinthians 15:51 Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed;

1 Corinthians 15:52 in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.

1 Corinthians 15:53 For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal *must* put on immortality.

Jesus promised to return for His Church and take us home to be with Him in heaven before He comes back to earth to set up a kingdom. We call this the Rapture of the Church, and it is what these verses in 1 Corinthians Fifteen are describing. At the Rapture, the spirits of deceased believers will be reunited with their resurrection bodies, and then living believers will be instantly changed to have glorified, resurrection bodies - without ever experiencing death.

After the Rapture believers will stand before Jesus in heaven to receive rewards for the Spirit-led work they performed as Christians:

2 Corinthians 5:10 For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things *done* in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.

Resurrection and reward after the rapture is the personal future God has revealed to believers in His Word...

%o The personal future of unbelievers is very different from the personal future of believers...

Unbelievers die having rejected Jesus Christ and His offer of salvation by grace through faith. When their earthly life ends, eternity begins for them as well.

According to Luke 16, those who die without a Savior are immediately consciously alive in a place of suffering and torment called Hades. There they wait until, at the end of human history, all of the Christ-rejecting dead from all time are raised to stand before a very different kind of judgment. No place can be found for them in heaven and, so, they are cast alive into a lake burning with fire to spend eternity separated from God and suffering for their sins. This lake of fire burning forever is Hell.

Hell is the personal future God has revealed to unbelievers in His Word...

You might be called upon to interpret this personal future that God has revealed...

#2 You Might Be Called Upon To Interpret The Prophetic Future That God Has Revealed To Men In His Word (41:1-57)

Pharaoh's dreams involved something more than his own personal future. They involved the prophetic future of human history.

The dreams are described in verses one through seven. In verse eight you read,

Genesis 41:8 Now it came to pass in the morning that his spirit was troubled, and he sent and called for all the magicians of Egypt and all its wise men. And Pharaoh told them his dreams, but *there was* no one who could interpret them for Pharaoh.

Pharaoh depended on a professional class of magicians and wise men for his mental health. They had developed vast and complex systems of research into the mind of man, complete with their own specialized vocabulary. But, when dealing with truth, they were exposed as false.

We have a professional class of magicians and wise men in mental health services today. They have developed vast and complex systems of research into the mind of man, complete with their own specialized vocabulary. But, when dealing with truth, they are exposed as false.

God has given you, according to 2 Peter 1:3, "...all things that *pertain* to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue."

Genesis 41:9 Then the chief butler spoke to Pharaoh, saying: "I remember my faults this day.

Genesis 41:10 "When Pharaoh was angry with his servants, and put me in custody in the house of the captain of the guard, *both* me and the chief baker,

Genesis 41:11 "we each had a dream in one night, he and I. Each of us dreamed according to the interpretation of his *own* dream.

Genesis 41:12 "Now there *was* a young Hebrew man with us there, a servant of the captain of the guard. And we told him, and he interpreted our dreams for us; to each man he interpreted according to his *own* dream.

Genesis 41:13 "And it came to pass, just as he interpreted for us, so it happened. He restored me to my office, and he hanged him."

Genesis 41:14 Then Pharaoh sent and called Joseph, and they brought him quickly out of the dungeon; and he shaved, changed his clothing, and came to Pharaoh.

The end of Chapter Forty-One told us, "the chief butler did not remember Joseph, but forgot him." Suppose he *had* remembered him and had somehow secured Joseph's early release? Joseph may have gone home to Canaan - only to die when the famine came.

God's perfect timing requires that you be perfected in your patience...The next time you grow tired of waiting for the promises of God to be fulfilled, encourage yourself that God is doing something infinitely better for you than you desire, something exceedingly abundantly beyond what you would ask or even think!

Genesis 41:15 And Pharaoh said to Joseph, "I have had a dream, and *there is* no one who can interpret it. But I have heard it said of you *that* you can understand a dream, to interpret it."

Genesis 41:16 So Joseph answered Pharaoh, saying, "*It is* not in me; God will give Pharaoh an answer of peace."

Joseph gave God the glory...

Notice something else, too. Joseph was confident that what he told Pharaoh was not of himself but was "of God," and would be without any private interpretation of his own. I think we can and should apply this principle today. It grieves me when I hear Christians hammering people with their own "private interpretations" of the Scriptures. God opens a door of testimony to an unbeliever and they crash through it with some pet doctrine or personal dogma.

It happens all the time. Rather than explaining the essentials of the Gospel, they concentrate on the controversies. Instead of talking about being born-again, they start immediately talking about the Baptism with the Holy Spirit and the sign of speaking in tongues. Instead of talking about the person's sinful condition and need for a Savior, they start immediately promising them health, wealth, and prosperity.

The person God leads you to share with is an eternal soul whose heart you can affect; they are not an audience for you to try out your latest ideas upon. Learn to separate the essentials from the controversies.

Verses seventeen through thirty-six describe Joseph's interpretation *and* his instruction to Pharaoh. The interpretation was of no benefit without God's instruction.

What we believe about the future that God has revealed will shape how we live in the present. The popular prophecies of tabloids and television are portrayed as mere probabilities; they may or may not occur. They are interesting but that's all. Bible prophecy is not just interesting, it is instructive. Since what God has prophesied will happen just as He said, we adjust our lives and lifestyles according to our understanding of the future.

Pharaoh elevated Joseph to the rank of Prime Minister over Egypt. Just as the Lord had said, the seven years of plenty were followed by the seven years of famine. Egypt was prepared, and you read in verses fifty-five through fifty-seven,

Genesis 41:55 So when all the land of Egypt was famished, the people cried to Pharaoh for bread. Then Pharaoh said to all the Egyptians, "Go to Joseph; whatever he says to you, do."

Genesis 41:56 The famine was over all the face of the earth, and Joseph opened all the storehouses and sold to the Egyptians. And the famine became severe in the land of Egypt.

Genesis 41:57 So all countries came to Joseph in Egypt to buy *grain*, because the famine was severe in all lands.

Joseph was called upon to reveal the prophetic future that God had revealed. You might be called upon to do the same!

God has revealed the prophetic future of human history in the Bible. Today more than ever men are fascinated by future things - and you have the interpretation in your hands.

The prophetic future includes the following major historical events:

f The rebirth of the nation of Israel on May 14, 1948...

f The Rapture of the Church...

f A reunited Europe...

f Peace in the Middle East...

f The rebuilding of a temple in Jerusalem...

f The invasion of Israel by a confederation of Islamic nations, and the divine intervention of God in the Holy Land...

f The revealing of Europe's champion as the Bible's Antichrist...

f Three and one half years of hell on earth, culminating in the Battle of Armageddon...

f The visible, literal, physical return of Jesus Christ to earth with His Church to establish a one thousand year Kingdom on earth...

This is the prophetic future that God has revealed! Men's hearts are troubled today by the times in which we live. Speak to hearts about the glorious future God has outlined in His Word.

Conclusion

I skipped over Joseph's marriage to Asenath and the birth of his two children, Manasseh and Ephraim. His marriage to an Egyptian can seem odd in light of his example to us.

Remember, though, that Joseph is also a type of Jesus Christ. In this chapter we see that, after his sufferings, Joseph was exalted to the right hand of Pharaoh. He was robed in garments of glory and honor. Every knee in Egypt was compelled to bow to his authority.

Thus it was, too, that after *His* sufferings, our Lord Jesus Christ was exalted to the right hand of the Father in heaven. Having put off the garments of His glory by becoming a man, He is once again clothed in majesty. Every knee in heaven and in earth and under the earth will be compelled to bow to His authority.

Joseph's exaltation by Pharaoh is an illustration of Philippians 2:9-11, which reads,

Philippians 2:9 Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name,

Philippians 2:10 that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth,

Philippians 2:11 and *that* every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ *is* Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Perhaps Joseph's marriage to Asenath is a type, too.² If so, it is a type of Jesus Christ and *His* bride, the Church!

We don't want to press the type too far, but here are two things you can easily see:

^ Now that Joseph was exalted, Pharaoh chose a bride for him, one called by him to share the lofty seat of power that now belonged to the man at his right hand. Just so, we have been chosen by God the Father to be united with Jesus Christ and share His glory for all eternity.

% It was Asenath's part to have a share in bringing sons into glory. Just so, you and I share in bringing sons and daughters into glory by the preaching of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

There are other comparisons...See if you can discover them. While they are exciting, we don't want to lose sight of the main emphasis of these verses, which is:

You can be a modern day Joseph, called upon to interpret the personal and the prophetic future God has revealed to men in His Word.

²see Phillips, *Exploring Genesis*, p. 321ff.