



The king's dreams

Colour me!



Genesis 41:1-16

Joseph became a slave in Egypt. Even though he worked hard and did what was right, he was unjustly thrown in prison by his master for two years. While in prison, God helped him interpret correctly the dreams of two of his cellmates, one was the king's personal servant, the other the chief cook. The king's personal servant was released shortly after and continued working in the king's court.

Two years later the king of Egypt dreamed he was standing beside the Nile River. Suddenly, seven fat, healthy cows came up from the river and started eating grass along the bank. Then seven ugly, skinny cows came up out of the river and ate the fat, healthy cows. When this happened, the king woke up.

The king went back to sleep and had another dream. This time seven full heads of grain were growing on a single stalk. Later, seven other heads of grain appeared, but they were thin and scorched by the east wind. The thin heads of grain swallowed the seven full heads. Again the king woke up, and it had only been a dream. The next morning the king was upset. So he called in his magicians and wise men and told them what he had dreamed. None of them could tell him what the dreams meant.

The king's personal servant said: Now I remember what I was supposed to do. When you were angry with me and your chief cook, you threw us both in jail in the house of the captain of the guard. One night we both had dreams, and each dream had a different meaning. A young Hebrew, who was a servant of the captain of the guard, was there with us at the time. When we told him our dreams, he explained what each of them meant, and everything happened just as he said it would. I got my job back, and the cook was put to death.

The king sent for Joseph, who was quickly brought out of jail. He shaved, changed his clothes, and went to the king. The king said to him, "I had a dream, yet no one can explain what it means. I am told that you can interpret dreams." "Your Majesty," Joseph answered, "I can't do it myself, but God can give a good meaning to your dreams."

Commentary

Joseph had to wait a very long time for his moment to shine. His experiences first as a slave and then as a prisoner had been far from easy. In one of the Psalms, the writer calls this long wait, Joseph's time of testing (105:19). However, God always planned to honour Joseph and, through him, to rescue his whole family, just as his childhood dreams had predicted.

Finally, it was a restless, dream-filled night for the Egyptian king that opened Joseph's cell door to freedom. The gift of understanding the meaning of dreams, which had so annoyed his brothers back home in Canaan, now became his passport to fame and fortune. He knew what the king's dreams about the cows and the corn meant. They meant that after seven years of plenty, years of famine were ahead. But because of Joseph's ability to interpret the dreams, there was time to prepare for the famine by storing food during the years of plenty. As a result, Joseph was appointed Prime Minister over Egypt to lead the preparation. He had had a long wait, but God was with him; and, as he acknowledges to his brothers at the end of the story, "God sent me on ahead of you... to save you in this wonderful way" (Genesis 45:7).

Questions

- ▶ Do you think that God still speaks to people through dreams today?
- ▶ What do you think kept Joseph going during his long years in prison?
- ▶ How long are you prepared to wait for an answer to prayer, especially when a situation (like Joseph's) seems hopeless?
- ▶ Why do you think the king trusted Joseph's explanation of his dreams?



Visual aid

Make a dream-catcher for yourself. Joseph's dreams came true in the end, and he was able, with God's help, to catch the meaning of other people's dreams too. There are lots of good instructional videos on YouTube.



Activity idea

Being able to have hopes and dreams is a special gift that God has given to people. He wants us to use this ability to inspire others to work for a better world. Cut out some dream bubbles, giving three to each member of your family. Invite everyone to draw or write what his or her dreams are for (a) themselves, (b) the family and (c) the world. Pin the bubbles up on a special family dreams board to remind yourselves what great hopes God has for you all.



Prayer idea

God's plan for Joseph was far bigger than he had ever dreamed. His ability to understand dreams meant that many people, not just his own family, were able to survive the seven years of famine. Find out about an area of the world experiencing famine today, pray for the modern-day Josephs who are trying to help those who suffer, and ask God to show you what you can do.

Key verse

I can't do it myself, but God can... (Genesis 41:16).

New Testament story link

Acts 12:5-17: This is the story of Peter, who was also rescued from prison because God still had big plans for him.



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