

The Chief Cupbearer did not Remember Joseph: He Forgot Him

40: 20-23

DIG: Why might the chief cupbearer forget Joseph? How long did Yosef continue to be imprisoned? What did he learn during that time? In what way did Joseph foreshadow the life of Christ?

REFLECT: Is there anyone that you have forgotten to repay a debt? How does your relationship with God maintain your hope despite life's circumstances to the contrary?

Now three days later, on Pharaoh's birthday, he gave a feast for all his officials. Joseph's interpretation of the dreams was correct. Pharaoh waited until his birthday to announce the results of his investigation. One might speculate that whatever plot had been laid against Pharaoh might have been intended to be consummated on this occasion; if so, that would lend peculiar significance to its exposure and punishment at that time.⁶²⁶ So Pharaoh lifted up the heads of the chief cupbearer and the chief baker in the presence of his officials (40:20). The rabbis teach that just as Israel is nearer to ADONAI, therefore will He punish them more severely; a king punishes more harshly one who is closest to him because the servant knows more than anyone what the king wants.

42. The words of both Joseph and Jesus came true. The Eastern kings celebrated their birthdays by holding feasts and granting pardon to offenders.⁶²⁷ Here, Pharaoh availed himself of this custom to pardon the chief cupbearer. He restored the chief cupbearer to his position, so that he once again put the cup into Pharaoh's hand (40:21). But when Pharaoh turned to his former chief baker, he was angry. Here was the culprit, guilty as charged, and the penalty was death.⁶²⁸ So he hanged the chief baker as Joseph had said to them in his interpretation (40:22). **And just as Yosef's predictions came true, so will Messiah's: Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away (Matthew 24:35).**

There is a play on words here. When the verse says: He restored the chief cupbearer to his position, the word position literally means *cupbearing*. So it literally reads: He restored the chief cupbearer to his *cupbearing*. This is for emphasis, signifying that the cupbearer was not given a different position in the royal court, but he was restored to exactly the same position that he held before.⁶²⁹ The chief cupbearer, however, did not remember Yosef. He forgot him, but God did not (40:23). Humanly speaking, this was ingratitude, but spiritually speaking, it was not yet time for Joseph to be raised up. He would have to wait for two more years.

Joseph's faith was not destroyed by **his** circumstances. We cannot doubt that those years had a steadying effect on **Yosef's** character as **he** waited for the fulfillment of **the LORD's** purpose concerning **him**. **He** continued to focus on **El Shaddai, God Almighty**, not **his** circumstances (**49:24**). This is without exception the deepest joy in life.

These two years of waiting must also have had the effect of maturing while steadying **Yosef's** character. It is not too much to say that the confidence and dignity which **he** showed when **he** stood before **Pharaoh** had their foundations laid during these two years. No doubt from time to time **he** would hear what was going on in Egypt, and perhaps even in connection with the court, and yet day after day passed without any remembrance from **the chief cupbearer**. But can be sure that **he** never regretted putting **God** first and allowing **Him** to take care of **His** servant's interests. If we will take care of our character, **ADONAI** will take care of our interests and reputation either in this life or the next.

Daily faithfulness in ordinary duties is the very best preparation for future service. **Joseph** found plenty of work to do and occupied **his** time by ministering to the needs of others. *Those two years were in some ways the most important of **his** entire life.* The deeper the foundation, the more durable the building; and in those two years the foundation of **his** future influence was laid deep and strong. Some might have thought that the forty years spent by Moses in Midian keeping the sheep were unworthy of **his** position. But the keeping of sheep was the making of Moses. So also those two years of quiet endurance in prison went far in making **Joseph** the faithful man that **he** became.⁶³⁰