GENESIS

Chapter 40

*The Cupbearer and the Baker*

**Some time later, the cupbearer and the baker of the king of Egypt offended their master, the king of Egypt. 2 Pharaoh was angry with his two officials, the chief cupbearer and the chief baker, 3 and put them in custody in the house of the captain of the guard, in the same prison where Joseph was confined. 4 The captain of the guard assigned them to Joseph, and he attended them. After they had been in custody for some time, 5 each of the two men—the cupbearer and the baker of the king of Egypt, who were being held in prison—had a dream the same night, and each dream had a meaning of its own. 6 When Joseph came to them the next morning, he saw that they were dejected. 7 So he asked Pharaoh’s officials who were in custody with him in his master’s house, “Why are your faces so sad today?” 8 “We both had dreams,” they answered, “but there is no one to interpret them.” Then Joseph said to them, “Do not interpretations belong to God? Tell me your dreams.” 9 So the chief cupbearer told Joseph his dream. He said to him, “In my dream I saw a vine in front of me, 10 and on the vine were three branches. As soon as it budded, it blossomed, and its clusters ripened into grapes. 11 Pharaoh’s cup was in my hand, and I took the grapes, squeezed them into Pharaoh’s cup and put the cup in his hand.” 12 “This is what it means,” Joseph said to him. “The three branches are three days. 13 Within three days Pharaoh will lift up your head and restore you to your position, and you will put Pharaoh’s cup in his hand, just as you used to do when you were his cupbearer. 14 But when all goes well with you, remember me and show me kindness; mention me to Pharaoh and get me out of this prison. 15 For I was forcibly carried off from the land of the Hebrews, and even here I have done nothing to deserve being put in a dungeon.” 16 When the chief baker saw that Joseph had given a favorable interpretation, he said to Joseph, “I too had a dream: On my head were three baskets of bread. 17 In the top basket were all kinds of baked goods for Pharaoh, but the birds were eating them out of the basket on my head.” 18 “This is what it means,” Joseph said. “The three baskets are three days. 19 Within three days Pharaoh will lift off your head and hang you on a tree. And the birds will eat away your flesh.” 20 Now the third day was Pharaoh’s birthday, and he gave a feast for all his officials. He lifted up the heads of the chief cupbearer and the chief baker in the presence of his officials: 21 He restored the chief cupbearer to his position, so that he once again put the cup into Pharaoh’s hand, 22 but he hanged the chief baker, just as Joseph had said to them in his interpretation. 23 The chief cupbearer, however, did not remember Joseph; he forgot him.**

**40:1** *Some time after this*. Joseph was 17 when sold into slavery (37:2) and 30 when freed from jail (41:46). (TLSB)

 *cupbearer* … *baker*. High Egyptian court officials with authority over the drinks and food of Pharaoh’s household. Besides handling these official duties, they often were influential in the royal court. (TLSB)

**40:2** *chief cupbearer.* Would be the divinely appointed agent for introducing Joseph to Pharaoh (see 41:9–14). (CSB)

**40:3** *captain of the guard*. Potiphar’s title (37:36), so this prison was under his authority. The prisoners here were high-ranking. Some were reinstated but others executed (vv 21–22). (TLSB)

**40:4** *he attended them*. Waited on them. This was not mere menial service. (TLSB)

 *some time*. Lit, “some days,” an indefinite period that could even mean a year. (TLSB)

**40:5** *each dream had a meaning.* Throughout the ancient Near East it was believed that dreams had specific meanings and that proper interpretation of them could help the dreamer predict his future (see note on 20:3). God was beginning to prepare the way for Joseph’s rise in Egypt. (CSB)

Unlike other pairs of dreams (e.g., ch 41), in which both have the same interpretation. (TLSB)

**40:6** *troubled*. The men did not know what their dreams meant. Luther: “Through the dreams from God an impression of such a nature is made on the hearts that not only the intellect but also the will is troubled beyond normal” (AE 3:11). But not all dreams are from God. (TLSB)

**40:8** *no one to interpret*. They could not consult anyone in the prison. Luther: “Since certain instances strongly prove that dreams may be meaningful, they are not to be entirely rejected. However, to be of value, dreams must, as Paul says of prophesying in Rom. 12:7, be according to the analogy of faith. But how to know whether God or the devil inspired a dream cannot be taught by rules. Experience must reveal it” (*WLS* § 1273). (TLSB)

 *interpretations belong to God.* Only God can interpret dreams properly and accurately (see 41:16, 25, 28; Da 2:28). *Tell me.* Joseph presents himself as God’s agent through whom God will make known the revelation contained in their dreams—Israel is God’s prophetic people through whom God’s revelation comes to the nations (see 18:17 and note; 41:16, 28, 32). (CSB)

**40:11** *Pharaoh’s cup was in my hand*. The cupbearer saw himself in his former position. (TLSB)

**40:13** *lift up your head and restore you to your position.* See Ps 3:3; 27:6. For this meaning of the idiom “lift up one’s head” see 2Ki 25:27 and Jer 52:31, where the Hebrew for “released” in the context of freeing a prisoner means lit. “lifted up the head of.” (CSB)

**40:14** *when all goes well with you, remember me.* Unfortunately, the cupbearer “forgot him” (v. 23) until two full years later (see 41:1, 9–13). (CSB)

**40:15** *stolen*. Or, “kidnapped,” “forcibly carried off.” (TLSB)

 *dungeon.* Since the same Hebrew word is used, the author of Genesis has established a link with Joseph’s earlier experience at the hands of his brothers (the word is translated “cistern” in 37:24). (CSB)

*pit*. Same term as in 37:20. Here it means “dungeon.” (TLSB)

**40:17** *birds were eating it*. In the cupbearer’s dream, he had control over the grapes. But the baker, in his dream, was unable to get the food to Pharaoh. In his eagerness for a favorable outcome, the baker did not notice this disturbing difference. (TLSB)

**40:19** *lift off your head.* A grisly pun based on the same idiom used in v. 13. (CSB)

Probably by beheading. (TLSB)

 *hang you on a tree*. Or, “wood.” The corpse of the baker would be impaled and exposed for the birds to eat. (TLSB)

**40:20** *Pharaoh’s birthday.* Centuries later, the birthday of Herod the tetrarch would become the occasion for another beheading (see Mt 14:6–10). (CSB)

Egyptian texts say that on a pharaoh’s birthday, pardon was given to some prisoners. (TLSB)

 *lifted up the head*. Restored the cupbearer to honor and took off the baker’s head. (TLSB)

 **Ch 40** The dreams of the two prisoners mean death for the baker and life for the cupbearer. Yet the chief cupbearer forgot Joseph. Once people are free from danger or troubling situations, they so easily forget those who helped them, and they neglect to honor God, who delivered them. Although others may forget us, even if our father and mother forsake us, the Lord will take care of His people and remember them in His mercy (Ps 27:10). • Lord God, You have said, “I will not forget you,” and Your Word is true. Remember us in mercy for the sake of Your Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen. (TLSB)