

GENESIS

Chapter 40

Joseph Interprets Two Prisoners' Dreams

Some time after this, the cupbearer of the king of Egypt and his baker committed an offense against their lord the king of Egypt. 2 And Pharaoh was angry with his two officers, the chief cupbearer and the chief baker, 3 and he put them in custody in the house of the captain of the guard, in the prison where Joseph was confined. 4 The captain of the guard appointed Joseph to be with them, and he attended them. They continued for some time in custody. 5 And one night they both dreamed—the cupbearer and the baker of the king of Egypt, who were confined in the prison—each his own dream, and each dream with its own interpretation. 6 When Joseph came to them in the morning, he saw that they were troubled. 7 So he asked Pharaoh's officers who were with him in custody in his master's house, “Why are your faces downcast today?” 8 They said to him, “We have had dreams, and there is no one to interpret them.” And Joseph said to them, “Do not interpretations belong to God? Please tell them to me.” 9 So the chief cupbearer told his dream to Joseph and said to him, “In my dream there was a vine before me, 10 and on the vine there were three branches. As soon as it budded, its blossoms shot forth, and the clusters ripened into grapes. 11 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.” 12 Then Joseph said to him, “This is its interpretation: the three branches are three days. 13 In three days Pharaoh will lift up your head and restore you to your office, and you shall place Pharaoh's cup in his hand as formerly, when you were his cupbearer. 14 Only remember me, when it is well with you, and please do me the kindness to mention me to Pharaoh, and so get me out of this house. 15 For I was indeed stolen out of the land of the Hebrews, and here also I have done nothing that they should put me into the pit.” 16 When the chief baker saw that the interpretation was favorable, he said to Joseph, “I also had a dream: there were three cake baskets on my head, 17 and in the uppermost basket there were all sorts of baked food for Pharaoh, but the birds were eating it out of the basket on my head.” 18 And Joseph answered and said, “This is its interpretation: the three baskets are three days. 19 In three days Pharaoh will lift up your head—from you!—and hang you on a tree. And the birds will eat the flesh from you.” 20 On the third day, which was Pharaoh's birthday, he made a feast for all his servants and lifted up the head of the chief cupbearer and the head of the chief baker among his servants. 21 He restored the chief cupbearer to his position, and he placed the cup in Pharaoh's hand. 22 But he hanged the chief baker, as Joseph had interpreted to them. 23 Yet the chief cupbearer did not remember Joseph, but 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). (CSB)

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. (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...mention 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)

pit. 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)

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)