

Genesis

Chapter 40



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Jewish Study Bible Introduction: Joseph the dream interpreter. In this chapter, we hear of the second of the three pairs of dreams that mark pivotal moments in Joseph's life. The first pair (37:5-11) were Joseph's own, and their interpretation came not from him, but from his outraged brothers and incredulous father. Taken for dreams of kingship, they nearly result in the dreamer's death, and leave him in slavery (37:18-28). Joseph decodes the second set of dreams himself, through a hitherto unmentioned God-given talent. They treat of the same polarity, favor from the king (v.13), reminiscent of the nearly lethal favor Joseph received from his father (37:3), on the one hand, and death, on the other (v.19).¹

Torah Class: About eleven years had passed since his older brothers sold Joseph into slavery. He's 28 years old, now. I wonder if Joseph still thought his dreams of his family bowing down to him, that had much to do with his current condition, bore any significance; or, were they just that...dreams of childhood? Because from where he sat, so long removed from Canaan and from his family, he may well have forgotten all about those sheaves of grain bowing before him, and the sun and the moon and eleven stars paying homage to him. But, let's be very clear about what those dreams meant to Joseph: it meant to him that, if they were true, HE was going to get the firstborn blessing. That the first 10 of his older brothers would be skipped over, and HE would become the inheritor of all the wealth and authority of the clan of Israel.²

Chumash: The Last Word:

From the actions of Potifar's wife, we can learn a powerful lesson about judging other people:

At first glance, Potifar's wife's actions appear to have been utterly evil. Not only did she cause Joseph to be sent to prison, but furthermore, she spoke badly of him so that his name was blackened throughout Egypt.

Rashi however enlightens us to the truth, that even these actions were intended for the sake of Heaven! Despite the fact that she was brought up in the corrupt, idolatrous atmosphere of Egypt he intentions were pure, to the extent that our sages compared her to Tamar, the mother of, "strong ones and righteous ones" (*Rashi to 38:18*). From this we can learn the importance of not judging other people by first appearances. (*Based on Sichas Shabbos Parshas Mikeitz 5740*)³

¹ The Jewish Study Bible, Tanakh Translation, Berlin & Brettler, Jewish Publication Society, Oxford Press

² Torahclass.com/index.html, Thomas Bradford, Merritt Island, Florida

³ Chumash, The Gutnick Edition, Genesis, Rabbi Chaim Miller, Published by Kol Menachem

Genesis 40:1

And it came to pass after these things, *that* the butler of the king of Egypt and his baker had offended their lord the king of Egypt.

[butler] *mashqeh*, (H4945), *mash-keh'*; from Hebrew 8248 (*shaqah*); properly *causing to drink*, i.e. a *butler*; by implication (intransitive) *drink* (itself); figurative a *well-watered* region :- butler (-ship), cupbearer, drink (-ing), fat pasture, watered.

The cupbearer was a high-ranking member of a monarch's court (see Neh. 1:11). He would have to be a trusted individual, since his primary responsibility was to taste all of his lord's food and drink and thus prevent his lord from being poisoned.

(Neh. 1:11) *O Lord, I beseech thee, let now thine ear be attentive to the prayer of thy servant, and to the prayer of thy servants, who desire to fear thy name: and prosper, I pray thee, thy servant this day, and grant him mercy in the sight of this man. For I was the king's cupbearer.*

Most likely not only the cup-bearer, but overseer of the royal vineyards, as well as the cellars; having, probably, some hundreds of people under him.

[baker] '*aphah*, (H644), *aw-faw'*; a primitive root; to *cook*, especially to *bake* :- bake, (-r, [-meats]), confectioner.

May have been the cook, had the superintendence of everything relating to the providing and preparing of meats for the royal table. Both officers, especially the former, were, in ancient Egypt, always persons of great rank and importance; and from the confidential nature of their employment, as well as their access to the royal presence, they were generally the highest nobles or princes of the blood.⁴

[butler of the king of Egypt and his baker] Wine Steward or Cup-bearer and the baker of Pharaoh.

[had offended] Not sure what the offence was. They may have been accused of attempting to take away the king's life, one by poisoning his drink, the other by poisoning his bread or confectionaries. Perhaps the food and wine just didn't taste good.

[offenses against Pharaoh] Offenses against Pharaoh certainly could have taken many forms. Whether these officials were suspected of involvement in a conspiracy or just guilty of displeasing Pharaoh in the disposition of their duties is impossible to tell. It may be that they are under house arrest awaiting the investigation of charges against them.⁵

⁴ JFB Commentary

⁵ Bible Background Commentary

Cumash: Classic Questions: “Why does this section follow the account of Potifar’s wife?”

Rashi: Since that cursed woman had accustomed everybody to talk [badly] about [Joseph] the righteous one, God brought to [the Egyptians] the sin of these [men, the butler and the baker], so that [the Egyptians] would turn [their attention] to them and not to [Joseph]. And furthermore, so that relief would come through them to [Joseph], the righteous one.⁶

Genesis 40:2

And Pharaoh was wroth against two of his officers, against the chief of the butlers, and against the chief of the bakers.

Ramban: (Nachmanides) “Against two “*sarisav*” (of his Eunuchs). These two lords were both castrates, for as they also acted as the chiefs of the butlers and bakers in the women’s quarters in the royal apartments, the kings would customarily castrate them. Onkelos’ opinion though is that *sarisim* means lords and chiefs. Thus he says of Potiphar, who is called *sris par’oh*, “the officer of Pharaoh,” and in the present verse he similarly translates, “against his two officers,” And so did the Targum Yonathan translate: *And they shall be “sarisim” in the palace of the king of Babylon.*⁷

Genesis 40:3

And he put them in ward in the house of the captain of the guard, into the prison, the place where Joseph was bound.

The butler (*mashgeh*), or *drink-giver*, was a valued member of Pharaoh’s household. In Neh 1:11 the word is translated “cupbearer.” Nehemiah, who bore that title, was a trusted official in the palace of the Persian monarch. The baker (*opeh*) was the superintendent of the bakery, responsible for seeing to it that the monarch’s food was safe and palatable. These two high officials in the royal household had offended Pharaoh. Pending investigation, they were confined in the same prison to which Joseph had been committed. These would also “tasters” to assure the absence of poison, etc.⁸

[bound] '*acar*, (H631), *aw-sar'*; a primitive root; to *yoke* or *hitch*; by analogy to *fasten* in any sense, to *join*

[was bound] Confusing term, He probably couldn't have been bound while carrying out his duties of Genesis 39:22,23, but may have been left bound at nights or when not on duty (Psalm 105:17-20). Scholars don't agree and may be confused on this phrase.

Where Joseph was bound—The place in which Joseph was now confined; this is what is implied in being bound; for, without doubt, he had his personal liberty. As the butler

⁶ Chumash, The Gutnick Edition, Genesis, Rabbi Chaim Miller, Published by Kol Menachem

⁷ Ramban, Nachmanides, Commentary on the Torah, Genesis, Rabbi C. Chavel, Shilo Publishing House

⁸ Chuck Missler, Notes on Book of Genesis Commentary, Genesis Study, KHouse.org

and. the baker were state criminals they were put in the same prison with Joseph, which we learn from the preceding chapter, Genesis 39:20, was the king's prison. All the officers in the employment of the ancient kings of Egypt were, according to Diodorus Siculus, taken from the most illustrious families of the priesthood in the country; no slave or common person being ever permitted to serve in the presence of the king. As these persons, therefore, were of the most noble families, it is natural to expect they would be put, when accused, into the state prison.⁹

Whatever was their crime, they were committed, until their case could be investigated, to the custody of the captain of the guard, that is, Potiphar, in an outer part of whose house the royal prison was situated.¹⁰

McGee: What does this reveal? It certainly reveals to us the arbitrary and dictatorial position and policy that the pharaohs of Egypt had. I don't know what the baker did— maybe he burned the biscuits for breakfast. For some whim, Pharaoh put him into prison. What did the butler do? Maybe he was bringing up a glass of wine to Pharaoh and stubbed his toe and spilled it on the Persian rug that was there. I don't know. It isn't told us why both the baker and the butler of Pharaoh were in the prison, but the important thing is that they are put where Joseph is. Joseph occupies a good position, even here in the prison. Everywhere he went, his ability was certainly recognized. "A man's gift maketh room for him, and bringeth him before great men" (Prov. 18:16). Certainly this was true for Joseph. And God is moving in his life with a very definite purpose.¹¹

(Proverbs 18:16) *A man's gift maketh room for him, and bringeth him before great men.*

Torah Class: Joseph is sitting in prison, because the wife of his master, Potiphar, lied and said he tried to assault her. How long he had been languishing in prison is difficult to know...but it was long enough that he gained the trust of the jailer. Then something happened, and Pharaoh became angry with two high government officials: the official cupbearer, and the head baker. These were NOT servant positions, though EVERYBODY was, by definition, subservient to Pharaoh. No, these men were likely right in line behind Potiphar in authority. But, as is often the case with Orientals (remembering it was Orientals...Semites.... not Egyptians, now ruling Egypt), some unknown offense winds up costing men their freedom or their lives. Likely as not, the Pharaoh was simply in a bad mood, or unknowingly (as these two officials were apparently Egyptian) they committed some foopah of Oriental sensibilities, and these two men wind up arrested; and like Joseph, held in the house of the prison captain...not the regular prison as the common folk had to suffer.¹²

⁹ Adam Clarke's Commentary on the Old Testament

¹⁰ JFB Commentary

¹¹ McGee, J. V. (1997, c1981). *Thru the Bible commentary*. Based on the Thru the Bible radio program. (electronic ed.) (1:161). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

¹² Torahclass.com/index.html, Thomas Bradford, Merritt Island, Florida

Chumash: Toras Menachem: However, this again was an expression of her “slavery” to astrology. After Joseph was already in jail, she realized that the idea of her having children through Joseph was a lost cause. The only option that remained was for her daughter to have children through Joseph.

So Potifar’s wife wondered. “

How can I make sure that Joseph stays in Egypt until my daughter reaches marriageable age? He desperately wants to return home to his father. I’m sure he’ll find his way back, sooner or later.”

Potifar’s wife concluded that the only way to ensure that Joseph remained in jail until her daughter was ready was to spread a negative propaganda campaign about him throughout Egypt. Therefore, she “accustomed everybody to talk [badly] about [Joseph],” in order to make sure that it would be impossible for him to argue his way out of jail, and return home unnoticed.

Thus, in the final analysis we see that even Potifar’s wife’s campaign to discredit Joseph throughout the whole of Egypt was in fact – at the literal level of Torah interpretation – an act carried out “for the sake of Heaven.”¹³

Genesis 40:4

And the captain of the guard charged Joseph with them, and he served them: and they continued a season in ward.

They continued a season—יָמִים yamim, literally days; how long we cannot tell. But many suppose the word signifies a complete year; and as Pharaoh called them to an account on his birthday, Genesis 40:20, Calmet supposes they had offended on the preceding birthday, and thus had been one whole year in prison.¹⁴

[the captain of the guard charged Joseph with them] not the keeper, though he was most favorably disposed; but Potiphar himself, who, it would seem, was by this time satisfied of the perfect innocence of the young Hebrew; though, probably, to prevent the exposure of his family, he deemed it prudent to detain him in confinement (see Psalm 37:5).¹⁵

Ambrose: “in the will of the King”

What can I say in regard to those eunuchs? They ought to serve as an example to other eunuchs that their standing is fragile and weak and all their hope lies in the will of the king?; for them a slight offense is a very great danger, while prosperity is a paltry condition of service. One boasted because he was the chief butler, the other because he was the chief baker. Both committed offenses, were put into prison and were entrusted to the holy Joseph by the jailer of the prison. (*On Joseph 6:29*)¹⁶

¹³ Chumash, The Gutnick Edition, Genesis, Rabbi Chaim Miller, Published by Kol Menachem

¹⁴ Adam Clarke’s Commentary on the Old Testament

¹⁵ JFB Commentary

¹⁶ Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture, Genesis, Thomas C. Oden, Intervarsity Press

Genesis 40:5

And they dreamed a dream both of them, each man his dream in one night, each man according to the interpretation of his dream, the butler and the baker of the king of Egypt, which *were* bound in the prison.

[**each man according to the interpretation**] Not like dreams in general, the disordered workings of the mind, the consequence of disease or repletion; these were dreams that had an interpretation, that is, that were prophetic.

Word Focus

dream

(Heb. *chalom*) (37:5; 40:5; 41:7; Joel 2:28) H2472: The word simply means “to dream.” The ancients understood a dream or a vision as “watching during sleep,” suggesting a special state of consciousness. Often dreams were recognized as revelations from the gods, or from the Lord God Himself in the case of the Hebrews. Many times these dreams and visions were encoded in symbolic language that needed interpretation. Those who could interpret dreams possessed power in the ancient world (41:37–40; Dan. 2:46–48). Joseph both received and interpreted such messages but was able to interpret the figures and symbols of dream-events only as God enabled him (40:8; 41:16)¹⁷

Genesis 40:6

And Joseph came in unto them in the morning, and looked upon them, and, behold, they *were* sad.

[**they were sad**] They concluded that their dreams portended something of great importance, but they could not tell what.

Genesis 40:7

And he asked Pharaoh’s officers that *were* with him in the ward of his lord’s house, saying, Wherefore look ye *so* sadly to day?

Chrysostom; “Evidence of Joseph’s characteristic virtue” This remarkable man, however, concerned for their comfort, noticed that they were dismayed by the experience of the dreams and confused in mind; so he asked, “Why so downcast today?” The defection on their faces, you see, betrayed the apprehension within them. Hence a sage too has said, “When the heart is free from care, the face beams, but when it is in mourning the face falls.” So, when he saw them lost in dejection from the experience of their dreams, he questioned them to discover the cause. See how, even when he found

¹⁷ Nelson Study Bible

himself in prison, he gave evidence of his characteristic virtue and was concerned to relieve the sadness of others. (*Homilies on Genesis 63:4*)¹⁸

Genesis 40:8

And they said unto him, We have dreamed a dream, and *there is no interpreter of it.* And Joseph said unto them, *Do not interpretations belong to God? tell me them, I pray you.*

That Joseph did not lose faith in God's promise is proved by his willingness to interpret dreams. He was still convinced that God's revelation in his two previous dreams would be fulfilled; now he was confronted with two more opportunities.

He seized this opportunity to speak about God. Note how he associated himself with God.

[there is no interpreter] They either had access to none, or those to whom they applied could give them no consistent, satisfactory meaning.

[Do not interpretations belong to God?] God alone, the Supreme Being, knows what is in futurity; and if he have sent a significant dream, he alone can give the solution.

[they dreamed a dream] Joseph, influenced by the spirit of true religion, could feel for others (Eccles. 4:1; Romans 12:15; Phil. 2:4). Observing them one day extremely depressed, he inquired the cause of their melancholy; and being informed it was owing to a dream they had respectively dreamed during the previous night, after piously directing them to God (Da 2:30; Isaiah 26:10), he volunteered to aid them, through the divine help, in discovering the import of their vision. The influence of Providence must be seen in the remarkable fact of both officers dreaming such dreams in one night. He moves the spirits of men.¹⁹

(Daniel 2:30) *But as for me, this secret is not revealed to me for any wisdom that I have more than any living, but for their sakes that shall make known the interpretation to the king, and that thou mightest know the thoughts of thy heart.*

When the subject of dreams came up, Joseph focused everyone's attention on God. Rather than using the situation to make himself look good, he turned it into a powerful witness for the Lord. One secret of effective witnessing is to recognize opportunities to relate God to the other person's experience. When the opportunity arises, we must have the courage to speak, as Joseph did.²⁰

¹⁸ Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture, Genesis, Thomas C. Oden, Intervarsity Press

¹⁹ JFB Commentary

²⁰ Life Application Notes

Surely God can interpret! May imply a critique of divination practices prominent in the ancient world. The contrast between Joseph, with his God-given talent for dream interpretation, and the bankruptcy of the Egyptian magicians is more pronounced in the next chapter, which deals with Pharaoh's dreams (41:8). The theme foreshadows Moses and Aaron's decisive confrontation with Pharaoh's magicians in Exodus Chapters 7-11 (see esp. Exodus 8:15).²¹

McGee: Joseph gives God all the glory in this. Later on we will find another young Hebrew in a foreign court who will do the same thing—Daniel also gave God the glory. I wish Christians today would do this. Anything you or I do for the Lord should be done to the praise of God. Make sure that God gets the glory for it. I believe that one of the reasons many of us are not blessed as much as the Lord would like to bless us is because when we do receive something wonderful, we take it for granted and we do not give God the glory for it. We need to give God the glory. Joseph should give God the glory, and he does! He says, “Do not interpretations belong to God?”²²

Ramban: (Nachmanides) The meaning thereof is that “there is no one to inform us concerning the future which can be derived from the dream.” It is possible that they sent for some magicians in the morning, of that there were people with them in the prison, but no one could interpret it. It may be that they said; “There is no one in the world, in our opinion, who can interpret it, for it is very obscure.”²³

Ramban: (Nachmanides) “Do not (“*halo*”) interpretations belong to God?” Rabbi Abraham ibn Ezra explained it as saying that “future events destined to come as indicated in dreams belong to G-d, for He alone brings on the dream and lets the future be know, and it is He who makes peace, and creates evil, but in my speaking to you there is neither benefit nor loss.” This he said so that they should not punish him if evil should befall them, or so that they should tell him the dreams and not scorn him.

But if so, there is no sense for the word *halo* (do not) in this context. Perhaps its meaning is the same as that of the word *hinei* (behold). Thus Joseph is saying, “Behold, to God alone belong interpretations, but not to man the interpreter.”

In my opinion the correct interpretation is that Joseph is saying; “Do not interpretations of all dreams which are obscure and confined belong to G-d? He can make known the interpretation of your dreams. Now if it is obscure to you tell it to me; perhaps He will be pleased to reveal His secret to me.”²⁴

²¹ The Jewish Study Bible, Tanakh Translation, Berlin & Brettler, Jewish Publication Society, Oxford Press

²² McGee, J. V. (1997, c1981). *Thru the Bible commentary*. Based on the Thru the Bible radio program. (electronic ed.) (1:161). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

²³ Ramban, Nachmanides, Commentary on the Torah, Genesis, Rabbi C. Chavel, Shilo Publishing House

²⁴ Ramban, Nachmanides, Commentary on the Torah, Genesis, Rabbi C. Chavel, Shilo Publishing House

Genesis 40:9

And the chief butler told his dream to Joseph, and said to him, In my dream, behold, a vine *was* before me;

[**Genesis 40:9-11**] outline the different stages of the vine in producing grapes. There has been some controversy regarding whether vines grew in Egypt. Critics have denied this story on that ground, but now paintings have been discovered with pictures of vines. However, one wouldn't have to prove that vines grew in Egypt to verify that an Egyptian had a dream about a vine. The demands of unbelief are utterly ridiculous at times. Who in Egypt at this time would not know of the vines in Canaan or of the raisins and wines made from grapes and taken into Egypt and sold?²⁵

Genesis 40:10

And in the vine *were* three branches: and it *was* as though it budded, *and* her blossoms shot forth; and the clusters thereof brought forth ripe grapes:

Genesis 40:11

And Pharaoh's cup *was* in my hand: and I took the grapes, and pressed them into Pharaoh's cup, and I gave the cup into Pharaoh's hand.

This refers to a religious ceremony connected with the worship of Horus, seen in Egyptian paintings. Horus was the Falcon God

Genesis 40:12

And Joseph said unto him, *This is the interpretation of it: The three branches *are* three days:*

[**This is the interpretation of it**] Joseph gave the interpretation promptly without any time for prayer, as Daniel requested (Daniel 2:16-18), yet we read of Daniel having special skill to interpret dreams (Daniel 1:17).²⁶

The three branches are three days—That is, The three branches signify three days; so, this IS my body, that is, this bread signifies or represents my body; this cup IS my blood, REPRESENTS my blood; a form of speech frequently used in the sacred writings, for the Hebrew has no proper word by which our terms signifies, represents, etc., are expressed; therefore it says such a thing IS, for represents, points out, etc. And because several of our ancestors would understand such words in their true, genuine, critical, and sole meaning, Queen Mary, Bishops Gardiner, Bonner, and the rest of that demoniacal crew, reduced them to ashes in Smithfield and elsewhere!²⁷

²⁵ Dake's Study Notes, Dake's Study Bible

²⁶ Dake's Study Notes, Dake's Study Bible

²⁷ Adam Clarke's Commentary on the Old Testament

Genesis 40:13

Yet within three days shall Pharaoh lift up thine head, and restore thee unto thy place: and thou shalt deliver Pharaoh's cup into his hand, after the former manner when thou wast his butler.

The dream of the three vine branches of ripening grapes signified that Pharaoh would lift up the head of this man, that is, restore him to service within 3 days. "Three days" occurs frequently in Scripture: the trek to Mt. Moriah; Jonah in the great fish; Jesus in the tomb, etc.

Genesis 40:14

But think on me when it shall be well with thee, and show kindness, I pray thee, unto me, and make mention of me unto Pharaoh, and bring me out of this house:

This is the first mention of Joseph seeking escape and telling of his kidnapping (Genesis 37:18-36).

Make mention of me unto Pharaoh—One would have supposed that the very circumstance of his restoration, according to the prediction of Joseph, would have almost necessarily prevented him from forgetting so extraordinary a person. But what have mere courtiers to do either with gratitude or kindness?²⁸

Joseph asked the butler to **remember me** so that his case might be reviewed and he might be delivered from a false imprisonment. **Kindness** represents a word that also means "loyal love." Joseph spoke of a binding obligation that his interpretation of the dream had placed upon the butler.²⁹

Genesis 40:15

For indeed I was stolen away out of the land of the Hebrews: and here also have I done nothing that they should put me into the dungeon.

To this, Joseph added the request that the man remember him and seek his release from prison. (But 2 years will elapse...)³⁰

[land of the Hebrews] Abraham visited Egypt and his story may have been known by many Egyptians. The Hebrews were becoming powerful by this time in southern Canaan, and Egyptians no doubt knew this to be their land.

²⁸ Adam Clarke's Commentary on the Old Testament

²⁹ The Nelson Study Bible

³⁰ Chuck Missler, Notes on Book of Genesis Commentary, Genesis Study, KHouse.org

[dungeon] *bowr*, (H953), *bore*; from Hebrew 952 (*buwr*) (in the sense of Hebrew 877 (*bo'r*)); a pit *hole* (especially one used as a *cistern* or *prison*) :- cistern, dungeon, fountain, pit, well.

I have been stolen—most assuredly I was stolen; and here also have I done nothing. These were simple assertions, into the proof of which he was ready to enter if called on. **[Joseph said, . . . This is the interpretation]** Speaking as an inspired interpreter, he told the butler that within three days he would be restored to all the honors and privileges of his office; and while making that joyful announcement, he earnestly bespoke the officer's influence for his own liberation. Nothing has hitherto met us in the record indicative of Joseph's feelings; but this earnest appeal reveals a sadness and impatient longing for release, which not all his piety and faith in God could dispel.³¹

Joseph had two good reasons for seeking his release: being sold by his brothers into slavery and being framed by Potiphar's wife. In both cases he was an innocent victim. Presumably the butler would recognize the unfairness of Joseph's condition, since he himself had been unfairly charged and badly treated as well.³²

Genesis 40:16

When the chief baker saw that the interpretation was good, he said unto Joseph, I also was in my dream, and, behold, I had three white baskets on my head:

Genesis 40:17

And in the uppermost basket there was of all manner of bakemeats for Pharaoh; and the birds did eat them out of the basket upon my head.

[upon my head] It was the custom in Egypt to carry loads on the head, as seen in certain parts of the world even today.

Illustration. Every detail concerning the court of Egypt rings absolutely true. The chief butler and chief baker were high government officials. The reference to "all kinds of baked goods" (40:17) is illuminated by an Egyptian document that lists 38 types of cake and 57 kinds of bread made by the royal kitchens! Joseph's investment with signet ring, court dress (expressly intended by the Egyptian word translated "fine linen," 41:42), and the gold collar (chain) for his neck are established by documents and tomb paintings as appropriate to the creation of a vizier—the highest Egyptian official below Pharaoh himself.



³¹ JFB Commentary

³² The Nelson Study Bible

Other details. Other details mark the story as an authentic portrayal of Egyptian custom. The honors granted Joseph (41:43), and giving him an Egyptian name (v. 45) are well attested.

Genesis 40:18

And Joseph answered and said, This is the interpretation thereof: The three baskets are three days:

40:5-18. interpretation of dreams. Dream interpretations were usually carried out by experts who had been trained in the available dream literature. More information is available from Mesopotamia than from Egypt. Both the Egyptians and the Babylonians compiled what we call dream books, which contain sample dreams along with the key to their interpretation. Since dreams often depended on symbolism, the interpreter would have to have access to these documents preserving the empirical data concerning past dreams and interpretations. It was believed that the gods communicated through dreams, but not that they revealed the meanings of dreams. If they were going to reveal the meaning, why use a dream in the first place? But Joseph held a different view. He did not consult any “scientific” literature, but consulted God.³³

Genesis 40:19

Yet within three days shall Pharaoh lift up thy head from off thee, and shall hang thee on a tree; and the birds shall eat thy flesh from off thee.

The language of Joseph describes minutely one form of capital punishment that prevailed in Egypt; namely, that the criminal was decapitated and then his headless body gibbeted on a tree by the highway till it was gradually devoured by the ravenous birds.³⁴

[lift up thy head from off thee] Take your office from you.

[hang thee on a tree] Joseph now knew that the offense of the butler was trivial, while the baker's was punishable by death.

Lift up thy head from off thee—Thus we find that beheading, hanging, and gibbeting, were modes of punishment among the ancient Egyptians; but the criminal was beheaded before he was hanged, and then either hanged on hooks, or by the hands. See Lamentations 5:12:

“Princes are hanged up by their hand: the faces of elders were not honoured.”

³³ Bible Background Commentary

³⁴ Chuck Missler, Notes on Book of Genesis Commentary, Genesis Study, KHouse.org

The chief baker altogether misses the key point that Joseph's gift for interpretation depends on the grace of God. Instead, he imagines that it is all a matter of technique: Similar dreams must lead to similar interpretations (not an unreasonable expectation in light of the other pairs in 37:5 and 41:1-32). But Joseph notices a crucial detail that the chief baker has missed: Not Pharaoh but birds eat from the basket on his head. Having missed God's grace, the chief baker will be denied Pharaoh's as well.³⁵

The pun in **lift off your head** is more evident in the Hebrew text (v. 13). More literally, the words read, "Pharaoh will lift your head ... *from you*." That is, the line begins exactly as in v. 13, but with a deadly zinger at the end! It is not simply baked goods **the birds** will eat (v. 17), but the flesh of the baker. That is, he will not be allowed even a proper burial; he will instead be hanged and then his body will be left for the vultures. Clearly there was no point for Joseph to ask to be remembered by the baker (vv. 14, 15).³⁶

Genesis 40:20

And it came to pass the third day, which was Pharaoh's birthday, that he made a feast unto all his servants: and he lifted up the head of the chief butler and of the chief baker among his servants.

[Pharaoh's birthday, that he made a feast unto all his servants: and he lifted up the head of the chief butler and of the chief baker among his servants] Birthdays of rulers and their sons were observed with much ceremony:

1. Abraham for Isaac (Genesis 21:8)
2. King Ahasuerus (Esther 1:3)
3. Pharaoh (Genesis 40:20)
4. Herod (Matthew 14:6; Mark 6:21)

See Job 3; Jeremiah 20:14-18 for ones who cursed the day they were born.³⁷

[Pharaoh's birthday] The distinguishing a birthday by a feast appears from this place to have been a very ancient custom. It probably had its origin from a correct notion of the immortality of the soul, as the commencement of life must appear of great consequence to that person who believed he was to live forever. St. Matthew (Matthew 14:6) mentions Herod's keeping his birthday; and examples of this kind are frequent to the present time in most nations.

(Matthew 14:6) *But when Herod's birthday was kept, the daughter of Herodias danced before them, and pleased Herod.*

[lifted up the head of the chief butler, etc.] By lifting up the head, probably no more is meant than bringing them to trial, tantamount to what was done by Jezebel and the nobles of Israel to Naboth: Set Naboth on high among the people; and set two men, sons of Belial, to bear witness against him, etc.; 1 Kings 21:9, etc. The issue of the trial was, the

³⁵ The Jewish Study Bible, Tanakh Translation, Berlin & Brettler, Jewish Publication Society, Oxford Press

³⁶ The Neslon Study Bible

³⁷ Dake's Study Notes, Dake's Study Bible

baker alone was found guilty and hanged; and the butler, being acquitted, was restored to his office.

Only here do we learn that **the third day** was Pharaoh's birthday. The play on words of vv. 13, 19 comes to its culmination here in **he lifted the head**. Pharaoh brought both of the prisoners from their house arrest for all the other servants to see. The one he restored (v. 21), and the other he hanged (v. 22). It could be that there had been a threat against Pharaoh's life that involved the poisoning of food. Presumably the investigation led to two possible culprits, the butler who would serve Pharaoh his wine and the baker who would prepare bread for Pharaoh. The guilty party was executed; the other was given back his prestigious position. Pharaoh did this in the presence of **all of Pharaoh's servants** in order to both warn and encourage the servant household. Pharaoh would reward those who served him well, but would destroy any who meant him harm.³⁸

Genesis 40:21

And he restored the chief butler unto his butlership again; and he gave the cup into Pharaoh's hand:

Chumash: The Last Word: The natural reaction for Joseph, after being wrongly imprisoned would be utter contempt for Egypt and its government. Thus, when Joseph was joined by the chief butler and chief baker – two of Pharaoh's high-ranking ministers – it would only have been natural for Joseph to shun them and hate them.

Joseph, however, did the very opposite. Not only did he bear no grudge against Pharaoh's ministers, who were key members of the corrupt regime that had wrongfully imprisoned him, but he took an active interest in their welfare. In fact, he was even sensitive enough to notice that they had been troubled by their dreams, enquiring, "Why do your faces (look) so down today"?

In hindsight we see that from this single act of kindness Joseph was eventually saved, leading him to save the entire Egyptian people from starvation!

This teaches us: a) How important it is to be caring about other people, and b) Never to underestimate the power of one single good deed. Joseph's sensitivity to another's distress, a person whom he had every right to despise, led to the salvation of Egypt. *(Based on Sichas Shabbos Parshas Mikeitz 5734)*³⁹

Genesis 40:22

But he hanged the chief baker: as Joseph had interpreted to them.

execution. Hanging was a way of dishonoring the corpse of an executed person (see Joshua 8:29; 2 Samuel 4:12). It may involve suspension from a rope by the neck or impalement on a stake. The actual form of execution may be stoning or beheading.⁴⁰

³⁸ The Nelson Study Bible

³⁹ Chumash, The Gutnick Edition, Genesis, Rabbi Chaim Miller, Published by Kol Menachem

⁴⁰ Bible Background Commentary

(Joshua 8:29) *And the king of Ai he hanged on a tree until eventide: and as soon as the sun was down, Joshua commanded that they should take his carcase down from the tree, and cast it at the entering of the gate of the city, and raise thereon a great heap of stones, that remaineth unto this day.*

(2 Samuel 4:12) *And David commanded his young men, and they slew them, and cut off their hands and their feet, and hanged them up over the pool in Hebron. But they took the head of Ish-bosheth, and buried it in the sepulchre of Abner in Hebron.*

Genesis 40:23

Yet did not the chief butler remember Joseph, but forgot him.

Yet the significant fact for Joseph was that he was correctly interpreting dreams. He did not misunderstand God's revelations to him by dreams. He might not have understood his imprisonment, but he was encouraged in his faith. However, the cupbearer forgot him, *but God did not*. In this hope Joseph had a persistent faith. His faith was not destroyed by his circumstances.

Bread and Wine: First mentioned as Melchizedek administers to Abraham (Gen 14); the Baker and Wine Steward (Gen 40); The Lord's Last Supper (Mtt 26); and, Communion (1 Cor 11).

[Yet did not the chief butler remember Joseph, but forgot him] Normal behavior the man who is consecrated to a life of self-gratification.

[Yet did not the chief butler remember Joseph] Had he mentioned the circumstance to Pharaoh, there is no doubt that Joseph's case would have been examined into, and he would in consequence have been restored to his liberty; but, owing to the ingratitude of the chief butler, he was left two years longer in prison.

yet did not the chief butler remember Joseph—This was human nature. How prone are men to forget and neglect in prosperity, those who have been their companions in adversity (Amos 6:6)! But although reflecting no credit on the butler, it was wisely ordered in the providence of God that he should forget him. The divine purposes required that Joseph should obtain his deliverance in another way, and by other means.⁴¹

When Pharaoh's cupbearer was freed from prison, he forgot about Joseph, even though he had Joseph to thank for his freedom. It was two full years before Joseph had another opportunity to be freed (Genesis 41:1). Yet Joseph's faith was deep, and he would be ready when the next chance came. When we feel passed by, overlooked, or forgotten, we

⁴¹ JFB Commentary

shouldn't be surprised that people are often ungrateful. In similar situations, trust God as Joseph did. More opportunities may be waiting.⁴²

Torah Class: After some time Joseph noticed one morning that they both had puzzled and bothered countenances. He inquired what troubled them and they each reported that they had had a dream, and they couldn't understand what it meant. It wasn't that these men saw danger in their dreams...it was that in prison there were no seers available...no dream interpreters...to tell them the significance of their night visions. Dreams were considered to be important in that era, and so there were professional dream interpreters available for a fee. We begin to see the level of faith to which all of Joseph's sufferings had taken him, as he responds "don't interpretations belong to God?" And, he says, tell me your dreams.

They proceed, with the cupbearer going first. He speaks of a vine, with 3 branches, and grapes forming on the branches, which he makes into wine for the Pharaoh. Instantly, God gives Joseph the meaning, and Joseph tells the cupbearer some good news: within 3 days the Pharaoh will reinstate the cupbearer to his position, and all will be well.

This seems, now, to have emboldened the baker, who, undoubtedly as a result of witnessing the interpretation of the cupbearer's dream, expected equally as good news. The baker, who of course dreamt within the context of his life's experiences, just as the cupbearer had done within his own, saw 3 baskets of bread on his head, apparently stacked one upon the other. For, the uppermost basket attracted birds which came and ate the baked goods right from the basket, while still on the baker's head. Joseph had to tell the baker the bad news that on the same day that the cupbearer was going to be restored, the baker would lose his life. And, of course, that's exactly what happened.

One little detail: many versions say that the baker was hung from a tree. That's not really what was said; what was actually said is that he would be impaled on a tree. Hanging was not a typical manner of execution in this era, but beheading was. And, often the headless corpse was impaled on a stake (or a tree) as a warning to others.

Now, as an interesting aside: Egyptian hieroglyphs prove out many of the details of this story. For instance, the idea of the baskets on top of the baker's head; this was exactly the way males carried items in Egypt; they balanced them on their heads. The stacked baskets of bread on the baker's head were simply a normal means of conveying the bread from the ovens to the palace, which the baker would have done several times a day. We've all seen this sort of thing on TV Travel shows. But, here's the thing: you would NEVER see an Egyptian woman put a load on her head; rather, Egyptian women toted things on their shoulders and back. And, this was exactly the opposite from the customary way the Oriental cultures toted loads. So, this little insight is just one of many proofs of the authenticity of the Biblical narrative of Joseph's, and eventually Israel's, time in Egypt.

The last sentence of this chapter is a rather sad one, but so typical of mankind: Joseph, having shown kindness to the cupbearer, had requested that the cupbearer might do the same for him after being restored to his position. But, we are told that now that everything was back to normal for the cupbearer, he forgot about poor Joseph, and left him languishing away for a crime he had not committed.⁴³

⁴² Life Application Notes

⁴³ Torahclass.com/index.html, Thomas Bradford, Merritt Island, Florida

Clarke's Summary: Many commentators have seen in every circumstance in the history of Joseph a parallel between him and our blessed Lord. So, "Joseph in prison represents Christ in the custody of the Jews; the chief butler and the chief baker represent the two thieves which were crucified with our Lord; and as one thief was pardoned, and the other left to perish, so the chief butler was restored to his office, and the chief baker hanged." I believe GOD never designed such parallels; and I am astonished to find comparatively grave and judicious men trifling in this way, and forcing the features of truth into the most distorted anamorphosis, so that even her friends blush to acknowledge her. This is not a light matter; we should beware how we attribute designs to God that he never had, and employ the Holy Spirit in forming trifling and unimportant similitudes. Of plain, direct truth we shall find as much in the sacred writings as we can receive and comprehend; let us not therefore hew out unto ourselves broken cisterns that can hold no water. Interpretations of this kind only tend to render the sacred writings uncertain; to expose to ridicule all the solemn types and figures which it really contains; and to furnish pretexts to infidels and irreligious people to scoff at all spirituality, and lead them to reject the word of GOD entirely, as incapable of being interpreted on any fixed or rational plan. The mischief done by this system is really incalculable.⁴⁴

McGee Summary: Poor Joseph! This seems like a hopeless predicament now. Here he is, not only a slave, but one who has been falsely accused. Believe me, the prison bars are just as real as if he were guilty of some crime. The poor boy is here, and it is the purpose of Potiphar to forget him. That is his way of covering up the scandal that was in his own home. Joseph has to pay for Potiphar's cover-up. Joseph's one glimmer of light had been that the butler would remember him to Pharaoh. This seemed to be such a marvelous way of getting the ear of Pharaoh. But the butler is so elated with going back to his job and being in favor with Pharaoh again that he forgets all about poor Joseph. God wants to leave him there for a purpose. Suppose the butler had said to Pharaoh, "There is a prisoner down there who is innocent. He should not be there—he has been falsely accused. And he interpreted my dream for me. I sure would appreciate it, Pharaoh, if you would let him out." Suppose Pharaoh had let him out, don't you see what would have happened? He would have been at home in the land of Canaan at the time that Pharaoh needed him to interpret his dream. God wants to keep him nearby, and prison is a convenient place to keep him—there will be no difficulty in Pharaoh's finding him when he needs him.

In spite of the discouragement, Joseph believed that God was moving in his life, and there were fruits of faith which were apparent. He was faithful in every relationship of his life. He was faithful to Potiphar. In prison he was faithful to the keeper of the prison. He was faithful to God, always giving Him the glory. We will see later on that he will be faithful to Pharaoh, and he will be faithful to his own brothers. You see, Joseph's faith made him faithful. My friend, I believe that if you are truly a believer, you will be faithful.

⁴⁴ Adam Clarke's Commentary on the Old Testament

We are living in a day when one of the tragic things happening is that there are so few Christians one can depend upon. I have a friend who is the head of a large Christian organization. We had a chance to sit together alone in a foreign city, just he and I. He was telling me some of the problems he had. He is in a tremendous organization, and yet he was telling me how few men he could really trust in his organization. Remember, this is a *Christian* organization. We see so few men in true faithfulness to their positions. We thank God for those who are. I have always thanked the Lord that He has put around me, everywhere I have ever been, a few faithful ones. I tell you, they are dear ones who are a great encouragement.

Joseph was that kind of a man. His faith made him faithful. It also gave him his optimistic outlook on life, even under all his trials and temptations. And it was faith that gave him his sympathetic and kindly attitude toward everyone. Notice how kind he was to the butler and the baker. And later on we will see his kindness to his brothers. Another thing that his faith did for him was to make him a very humble man. He gave *God* the glory for all his achievements. What a wonderful person he was! And what was responsible? Well, he *believed* God. He believed God as his father Abraham had believed Him, and this was the fruit that faith produced in his life.

Here is Joseph—forgotten in the prison. But Someone has not forgotten him; God has not forgotten him, and He is at work in his life.

Friend, this has a message for you and me. I don't know what your circumstances are right now, but I do know, judging from the letters that I get, that many folk are in a hard place. One man wrote to me, "I am between a rock and a hard place. Things look very dark." You don't see the way out, and you wonder if God cares. That is the reason God has given this story of Joseph. He wants you to know that He cares and that He is moving in your life. If you are His child, He is permitting things to happen to you for your own good. His chastisements are always for our good. Friend, we can't miss! How wonderful our God is!⁴⁵

Gleanings in Genesis – Pink (Chapter 42)

37. Joseph Won the Respect of His Jailer

"But the Lord was with Joseph, and showed him mercy, and gave him favor in the sight of the keeper of the prison" (39:21). Is not the antitype of this found in the fact that the Roman centurion, the one who had charge of the crucifixion of the Saviour, cried, "Certainly this was a Righteous Man" (Luke 23:47). Thus did God give His Son favor in the sight of this Roman who corresponded with Joseph's jailor.

38. Joseph Renumbered with Transgressors

"And it came to pass that after these things, that the butler of the king of Egypt, and his baker had offended their lord the king of Egypt. And Pharaoh was wroth against two of his officers, against the chief of the butlers and against the chief of the bakers. And he put them in ward in the house of the captain of the guard, into the prison, the place where

⁴⁵McGee, J. V. (1997, c1981). *Thru the Bible commentary*. Based on the Thru the Bible radio program. (electronic ed.) (1:162). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

Joseph was bound” (40:13). What a marvelous line is this in our typical picture. Joseph was *not alone* in the place of shame and suffering. Nor was the Lord Jesus as He hung on the heights of Calvary. And just as there were *two* malefactors crucified with Him, so *two* offenders were in the prison with Joseph! But the analogy extends ever further than this.

39. Joseph Was the Means of Blessing to One, But the Pronouncer of Judgment on the Other

His fellow prisoners had each of them a dream, and in interpreting them, Joseph declared that the butler should be delivered from prison, but to the baker he said, “Within three days shall Pharaoh lift up thy head from off thee, *and shall hang thee on a tree*, and the birds shall eat thy flesh from off thee” (40:19). It is not without good reason that the Holy Spirit has seen fit to record the details of these dreams. Connected with the spared one, the butler, we read of “the cup” into which the grapes were pressed (49:10–12), suggesting to us the precious Blood of the Lamb, by which all who believe are delivered. Connected with the one who was not delivered, the baker, were baskets full of bakemeats (40:16, 17), suggesting human labors, the works of man’s hands, which are powerless to deliver the sinner, or justify him before God: for all such there is only the “Curse,” referred to here by the baker being “hanged on a tree” (cf. Gal. 3:13). So it was at the Cross: the one thief went to Paradise; the other to Perdition.

40. Joseph Evidenced His Knowledge of the Future

In interpreting their dreams, Joseph foretold the future destiny of the butler and the baker. But observe that in doing this he was careful to ascribe the glory to Another, saying, “Do not interpretations belong to God?” (40:8). So the One whom Joseph foreshadowed, again and again, made known what should come to pass in the future, yet did he say, “For I have not spoken of Myself; but the Father which sent Me, He gave Me a commandment, what I should say, and what I should speak” John 12:49).

41. Joseph’s Predictions Came True

“And it came to pass the third day, which was Pharaoh’s birthday, that he made a feast unto all his servants; and he lifted up the head of the chief butler and of the chief baker among his servants. And he restored the chief butler unto his butlership again; and he gave the cup into Pharaoh’s hand. But he hanged the chief baker: *as Joseph had interpreted to them*” (40:20–22). Just as Joseph had interpreted so it came to pass. So shall it be with every word of the Son of God, Heaven and earth shall pass away, but His words shall not pass away. And O, unsaved reader, just as the solemn announcement of Joseph concerning the baker as actually fulfilled, *so* shall these words of the Lord Jesus be found true “he that believeth not shall be damned!”

42. Joseph Desired to Be Remembered

Said Joseph to the butler, “But *think on me* when it shall be well with thee” (40:14). So, in connection with the Supper, the Saviour has said, “This do in remembrance of Me.” As we admire these lovely typical pictures, like the queen of Sheba, there is no more strength left in us, and we can only bow our heads and say, “How precious are Thy thoughts unto me, O God! How great is the sum of them!”⁴⁶

⁴⁶Pink, A. W. (2005). *Gleanings in Genesis* (369). Bellingham, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.

Book of Jasher: Chapter 46

- 1 In those days Joseph was still confined in the prison house in the land of Egypt.
- 2 At that time the attendants of Pharaoh were standing before him, the chief of the butlers and the chief of the bakers which belonged to the king of Egypt.
- 3 And the butler took wine and placed it before the king to drink, and the baker placed bread before the king to eat, and the king drank of the wine and ate of the bread, he and his servants and ministers that ate at the king's table.
- 4 And whilst they were eating and drinking, the butler and the baker remained there, and Pharaoh's ministers found many flies in the wine, which the butler had brought, and stones of nitre were found in the baker's bread.
- 5 And the captain of the guard placed Joseph as an attendant on Pharaoh's officers, and Pharaoh's officers were in confinement one year.
- 6 And at the end of the year, they both dreamed dreams in one night, in the place of confinement where they were, and in the morning Joseph came to them to attend upon them as usual, and he saw them, and behold their countenances were dejected and sad.
- 7 And Joseph asked them, Why are your countenances sad and dejected this day? and they said unto him, We dreamed a dream, and there is no one to interpret it; and Joseph said unto them, Relate, I pray you, your dream unto me, and God shall give you an answer of peace as you desire.
- 8 And the butler related his dream unto Joseph, and he said, I saw in my dream, and behold a large vine was before me, and upon that vine I saw three branches, and the vine speedily blossomed and reached a great height, and its clusters were ripened and became grapes.
- 9 And I took the grapes and pressed them in a cup, and placed it in Pharaoh's hand and he drank; and Joseph said unto him, The three branches that were upon the vine are three days.
- 10 Yet within three days, the king will order thee to be brought out and he will restore thee to thy office, and thou shalt give the king his wine to drink as at first when thou wast his butler; but let me find favor in thy sight, that thou shalt remember me to Pharaoh when it will be well with thee, and do kindness unto me, and get me brought forth from this prison, for I was stolen away from the land of Canaan and was sold for a slave in this place.
- 11 And also that which was told thee concerning my master's wife is false, for they placed me in this dungeon for naught; and the butler answered Joseph, saying, If the king deal well with me as at first, as thou last interpreted to me, I will do all that thou desirest, and get thee brought out of this dungeon.
- 12 And the baker, seeing that Joseph had accurately interpreted the butler's dream, also approached, and related the whole of his dream to Joseph.
- 13 And he said unto him, In my dream I saw and behold three white baskets upon my head, and I looked, and behold there were in the upper-most basket all manner of baked meats for Pharaoh, and behold the birds were eating them from off my head.
- 14 And Joseph said unto him, The three baskets which thou didst see are three days, yet within three days Pharaoh will take off thy head, and hang thee upon a tree, and the birds will eat thy flesh from off thee, as thou sawest in thy dream.

15 In those days the queen was about to be delivered, and upon that day she bare a son unto the king of Egypt, and they proclaimed that the king had gotten his first born son and all the people of Egypt together with the officers and servants of Pharaoh rejoiced greatly.

16 And upon the third day of his birth Pharaoh made a feast for his officers and servants, for the hosts of the land of Zoar and of the land of Egypt.

17 And all the people of Egypt and the servants of Pharaoh came to eat and drink with the king at the feast of his son, and to rejoice at the king's rejoicing.

18 And all the officers of the king and his servants were rejoicing at that time for eight days at the feast, and they made merry with all sorts of musical instruments, with timbrels and with dances in the king's house for eight days.

19 And the butler, to whom Joseph had interpreted his dream, forgot Joseph, and he did not mention him to the king as he had promised, for this thing was from the Lord in order to punish Joseph because he had trusted in man.

20 And Joseph remained after this in the prison house two years, until he had completed twelve years.⁴⁷

⁴⁷ The Book of Jasher, Faithfully Translated 1840, Hebrew to English, J.H.Perry & Co, Salt Lake City UT