

# genesis

## God's Book of Beginnings

### The Cupbearer and the Baker (Genesis 40)

**40:1-8** The king of Egypt became “angry” <sup>Proverbs 19:12</sup> with his cupbearer and baker, so Pharaoh threw them into the prison where Joseph was in charge <sup>Genesis 39:22</sup>. After “some time”, the cupbearer and baker each had a dream one night <sup>v.8</sup>. The next morning, Joseph asked them why they were sad <sup>Nehemiah 2:2</sup>, and was told about the dreams and their confusion concerning the meanings. Joseph remarked: “interpretations belong to God” <sup>Genesis 41:16, Deuteronomy 29:29</sup>, and wanting to help, Joseph asked the two officials to describe to him their dreams.

Both the Pharaoh’s cupbearer and baker had to be completely trustworthy servants, because they had the responsibility to provide the correct and unpoisoned drinks and food Pharaoh requested. Later, a Jewish cupbearer in Persia named Nehemiah was vital in rebuilding Jerusalem <sup>Nehemiah 1:11</sup>. The man (“the captain of the guard” <sup>v.4</sup>) who put Joseph in charge of the cupbearer and the baker, may have been the same man who put him in prison: “Potiphar, the captain of the guard” <sup>Genesis 39:1</sup>. The practice of interpreting prophetic dreams (oneiromancy) was popular/widespread in Egypt and Babylon <sup>Daniel 2:1-4</sup>, because dreams were thought to determine the future. As a result, there were many professional dream interpreters, but God warned about this false religion <sup>Deuteronomy 13:1-5</sup>. However, God allowed Joseph <sup>v.9-19, Genesis 41:17-32</sup> and Daniel <sup>Daniel 2:24-45, 4:19-27</sup> to interpret dreams, because they both gave Him the credit, and God chose both men to play important roles for Israel. These issues also illustrate God’s might being infinitely beyond that of powerful earthly nations.

**40:9-15** First, the cupbearer described his dream to Joseph, who explained the interpretation he had received from God (an implication here <sup>v.8</sup>, but explicitly stated later <sup>Genesis 41:16,25,28</sup>). He said that “within 3 days” the Pharaoh would “lift **up** [the cupbearer’s] head” and “restore [him] to his [previous] position”. Joseph asked for kindness <sup>1 Samuel 20:14-15</sup> from the cupbearer by remembering him <sup>Luke 23:42</sup> and what he had done <sup>1 Samuel 25:23-31</sup> for him, then mentioning his situation to Pharaoh so Joseph could be released from his unjust imprisonment.

Joseph used the phrase “land of the Hebrews” <sup>v.15</sup> revealing he knew Canaan was the PL <sup>Genesis 17:8</sup>.

## Genesis 40-41

**40:16-19** After the cupbearer's news, the baker eagerly requested his dream to be interpreted.

However, Joseph said that within three days the Pharaoh would "lift **off** [the baker's] head" and "hang [him] on a tree", where the "birds [would] eat away [his] flesh" <sup>Deuteronomy 28:26</sup>, indicating the baker would be put on public display as a warning to others about illegal acts.

God used the cupbearer's and baker's professions in their dreams to teach His intended lessons. This is similar to the approach Jesus applied when He used common cultural issues in His parables.

Three days <sup>v.12,18</sup> is a significant time period in the Bible: e.g. Abraham and Isaac's travel time to Mt. Moriah <sup>Genesis 22:4</sup>, Joseph imprisoned his brothers <sup>Genesis 42:17</sup>, darkness in Egypt <sup>Exodus 10:22</sup>, Jonah inside the fish <sup>Jonah 1:17</sup>, Jesus in the tomb <sup>Luke 24:17-27,46</sup>, Saul/Paul's blindness <sup>Acts 9:9</sup>.

Bread and wine are very important Biblical symbols: Melchizedek (and Abraham) <sup>Genesis 14:18-20</sup>, Passover (Jesus and His apostles) <sup>Luke 22:7-19</sup> and Communion (the church) <sup>1 Corinthians 11:23-26</sup>.

**40:20-23** On the third day, Pharaoh gave a party to celebrate his birthday. At the celebration, Pharaoh presented the cupbearer and baker to "his officials", then he restored one/killed one, just as the interpretations indicated. The cupbearer "did not remember Joseph" <sup>Ecclesiastes 1:11</sup>, but he remembered "2 years later" when he was "reminded of his shortcomings" <sup>Genesis 41:1,9</sup>.

Pharaoh "lifted up the heads" (idiom meaning released from prison <sup>2 Kings 25:27, Jeremiah 52:31</sup>) of the men, and brought them to his birthday party. However, while the cupbearer was returned to his job <sup>v.21</sup>, the baker's head was "lifted off" <sup>v.19</sup> (a graphic pun on the idiom) and then he was "hanged" <sup>v.22</sup>.

The term "hanged" actually referred to being 'impaled on a pole' <sup>Deuteronomy 21:22-23</sup>. Beheading and then impaling <sup>v.19</sup> (hung up for public display), was a common form of capital punishment in Egypt.

John the Baptist was also beheaded on the birthday of a ruler (King Herod Antipas) <sup>Matthew 14:6-12</sup>.

## Joseph Released from Prison (Genesis 41)

### Pharaoh's Dreams

**41:1-8** Two years later, Pharaoh had two separate dreams that troubled him <sup>Job 7:13-14, Daniel 2:1</sup>, and so he asked his mystical advisors for their meanings, but they had no answers <sup>Daniel 4:7,18</sup>.

Egyptian cattle commonly submerged themselves in the Nile River to escape the sun and insects.

Scorching east (desert) winds <sup>Hosea 13:15</sup> were known as *khamsin* in Egypt (and *sirocco* in the PL).

These winds blow mainly in late spring and early fall, often withering all of the vegetation <sup>Ezekiel 19:12</sup>.

How did Pharaoh's talk with his mystics about his dream <sup>v.8</sup> differ from Nebuchadnezzar's <sup>Daniel 2:5-6?</sup>

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## Genesis 40-41

**41:9-14** Pharaoh's dreams and their interpretation stimulated the cupbearer's memory.

He humbly told Pharaoh the story about Joseph correctly interpreting his and the baker's dreams 2 years earlier <sup>Genesis 40:9-19</sup>. So Pharaoh sent for Joseph and had him cleaned up.

**Moses said Joseph "shaved", because nations around Egypt were normally clean-shaven** <sup>Isaiah 18:2,7</sup>, while the Israelite men generally wore beards <sup>2 Samuel 10:5</sup>. Joseph also "changed his clothes", which was a common act prior to a person being presented to someone special <sup>Ruth 3:2-3, 2 Samuel 12:20</sup>.

**41:15-24** Pharaoh asked Joseph to interpret his dreams. Joseph's initial reply was to admit he could not interpret the dream, but "God [would] give Pharaoh the answer he desires" <sup>v.25-32</sup>.

Pharaoh described the dreams in detail and admitted his "magicians" could not explain them.

**The topic of Pharaoh's dreams (food) was an indication of the critical message God was conveying.**

**In addition to Joseph, Daniel** <sup>Daniel 2:27-28</sup> **gave God the glory for dream interpretations** <sup>2 Corinthians 3:5</sup>.

**41:25-32** Joseph immediately proclaimed to Pharaoh that the two dreams revealed the same message: God's revelation of His plans <sup>v.25,28,32, Isaiah 46:11b</sup> for the future history of Egypt:

"seven years of great abundance" would be followed by "seven years of famine" in Egypt.

It was declared twice by God to emphasize the certainty and imminence of the future events.

**41:33-36** Joseph explained that God would provide "seven years of abundance" to prepare the country of Egypt for the subsequent "seven years of famine". He followed the interpretation by boldly proceeding to tell Pharaoh the right course of action in response to the dreams.

He suggested Pharaoh find a "discerning and wise man" <sup>Proverbs 9:10</sup> to oversee other officials who would ensure adequate parts of the plentiful harvests would be stored for the lean years.

**Continuing to convey God's wisdom, Joseph instructed Pharaoh to set aside and store a "fifth" of the seven abundant harvests in order to adequately prepare for the seven years of famine to follow. Using human logic, how much of each harvest should have been saved in order to properly prepare?**

**41:37-40** Pharaoh recognized the plan was good, but was concerned about whether a man could be found like Joseph, "in whom is the spirit of God" <sup>Deuteronomy 34:9</sup>. However, Pharaoh quickly realized there was no one more qualified than Joseph, and placed him "in charge".

**Joseph and Pharaoh each mentioned a character trait helpful in managing the Egyptian food supply.**

**Joseph: "a discerning and wise man" <sup>v.33</sup> and Pharaoh: "one in whom is the spirit of God" <sup>v.38</sup>.**

**From the time he was sold into slavery** <sup>Genesis 37:12-28</sup>, **Joseph was faithful/obedient in all situations God placed him in (big/small). Now God rewarded him with greatness** <sup>Matthew 25:23, Philippians 2:8-9\*</sup>.

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## Joseph in Charge of Egypt

**41:41-45** Pharaoh made Joseph his “second in command” <sup>Esther 10:3, John 6:38\*</sup>, ruling over Egypt.

To indicate Joseph’s high office, he was given Pharaoh’s signet ring, royal robes, a gold chain.

In addition, Joseph rode in a special chariot signifying his exalted position, with subordinates shouting commands of reverence “before him” <sup>Esther 6:9b</sup>, as he travelled throughout Egypt.

He was also given an Egyptian name (Zaphenath-Paneah) and an Egyptian wife (Asenath).

Daniel was also promoted to a very high office after interpreting Nebuchadnezzar’s dream <sup>Daniel 2:1-45</sup>.

Note that Joseph’s faith journey started with him wearing an “ornamented robe” <sup>Genesis 37:3</sup>, and after his up-and-down life (slave ⇒ house-master ⇒ prison), he was back in “robes of fine linen” <sup>v.42</sup>.

Scholars continue to disagree on the meaning of Joseph’s Egyptian name (Zaphenath-Paneah).

What do you think God’s reaction was to Joseph marrying an Egyptian? <sup>Deuteronomy 22:10, 2 Corinthians 6:14</sup>

**41:46-52** Joseph was thirty years old when he became (in essence) Egypt’s prime minister.

During the “seven years of abundance”, he wisely prepared Egypt for the lean years ahead by doing exactly what he had proclaimed should be done <sup>v.33-36</sup>. Joseph & Asenath had 2 sons.

Joseph was placed in charge at the age of thirty, 13 years after he was sold into slavery <sup>Genesis 37:2</sup>.

The age of thirty has great significance in the Bible: a Levite could not serve in the Tabernacle until the age of thirty <sup>Numbers 4:46-48</sup>. Other Biblical men who had significant events at the age of thirty:

David became king <sup>2 Samuel 5:4</sup>, Ezekiel became a prophet <sup>Ezekiel 1:1</sup>, Jesus started His ministry <sup>Luke 3:23\*</sup>.

The meanings of the names of Joseph’s two sons (Manasseh: forgetful and Ephraim: fruitful) represent God’s blessing on his life: a ‘fruitful’ later life allowing him to ‘forget’ the earlier suffering.

Jacob later adopted them <sup>Genesis 48:8-20</sup>, giving a double portion of Jacob’s inheritance to Joseph and sons <sup>Joshua 16:4</sup>. The sons of Joseph’s Egyptian wife became prominent tribes of Israel <sup>Ezekiel 48:1-7</sup>.

Psalm 105 tells of Joseph’s prophetic dreams, suffering, prison release and rise to rule <sup>Psalm 105:16-22</sup>.

**41:53-57** Just as God had prophesied through Joseph, after the seven years of abundance,

the years of famine began, with the problem existing in Egypt and in “all the other lands”.

When Egypt’s families started running out of food, Pharaoh directed them to go to Joseph.

Both the people of Egypt and those throughout the world came to Joseph to buy grain.

The following words that Mordecai later spoke to Esther were also perfectly applicable to Joseph:

“...who knows but that you have come to royal position for such a time as this?” <sup>Esther 4:14</sup>

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