

CHAPTER 40

INTRODUCTION TO GENESIS 40

The history of this chapter is, the imprisonment of two of Pharaoh's officers, his chief butler and chief baker, who by the captain of the guard were made the charge of Joseph, (⁰⁴⁰¹Genesis 40:1-4); they both dreamed in prison, which made them sad; Joseph taking notice of their sadness, asked the reason of it, and encouraged them to tell him their dreams, (⁰⁴⁰⁵Genesis 40:5-8); the chief butler told his dream of the vine and three branches, which Joseph interpreted of his restoration to his office within three days, and desired him to remember him unto Pharaoh when he stood before him, telling him his case, (⁰⁴⁰⁹Genesis 40:9-15); then the chief baker told his dream of three white baskets of food on his head, which the birds ate, and this Joseph interpreted of his being hanged within three days, (⁰⁴¹⁶Genesis 40:16-19); and the events answered to the interpretation, but Joseph was forgot by the chief butler, (⁰⁴²⁰Genesis 40:20-23).

Ver. 1. *And it came to pass after these things*, etc.] After Joseph had been accused and cast into prison, where he had been for some time:

[that] the butler of the king of Egypt and [his] baker had offended their lord the king of Egypt; committed some fault, at least were accused of one, which raised his displeasure at them. The Targum of Jonathan says, that they consulted to put poison into his drink and food; which, it is not improbable, considering their business and office, they might be charged with; at least it is much more probable than what Jarchi suggests, that the one put a fly into his cup, and the other a little stone or sand into his bread.

Ver. 2. *And Pharaoh was wroth against two [of] his officers*, etc.] The same above mentioned:

against the chief of the butlers, and against the chief of the bakers; for as there were several butlers and bakers that belonged unto him, who were employed in providing wine and food for him, there was one of each who was over the rest; and as their business was to see that those under them did their work well, when they were faulty the principal officers were answerable for it: wherefore, if in this case they had not been guilty of

anything criminal themselves personally, yet they might have neglected to look after those that were under them, and so were culpable, and drew upon them the wrath and resentment of their lord and sovereign.

Ver. 3. *And he put them in ward in the house of the captain of the guard,* etc.] Who is generally thought to be Potiphar, since this was the office he was in, (¹⁶³⁰Genesis 39:1); unless he was dead, and there was another put into his room, or there were more than one in the same office:

into the prison, the place where Joseph [was] bound; that is, where he had been bound, and where he was still a prisoner, though not fettered and in that close confinement he had been in.

Ver. 4. *And the captain of the guard charged Joseph with them,* etc.] Committed them to his care and custody, he being very probably recommended to him by the keeper of the prison for his prudence and fidelity; and if it was Potiphar, he knew his character full well, and might be now reconciled unto him, as having had a more full and clear account of the affair between him and his wife from the keeper of the prison; and therefore though he might not think fit for his own and his wife's reputation to remove him from prison as yet, nevertheless might be inclined to do him what service he could, as well as honour, as this was, to have two such state prisoners committed to his care. Some render it, "he committed Joseph with them"^{f1698}; to be with them, as Jarchi interprets it; they were put together, not merely for the sake of company, but that Joseph might wait upon them, which might be beneficial as well as creditable, as it follows:

and he served them; he ministered unto them, and brought them every thing they wanted:

and they continued a season in ward; or "days"^{f1699}; some certain days, many days, a year, as Jarchi and Ben Gersom interpret it, and which is sometimes the use of the word. The story of the butler and baker is told, partly to show the divine faculty of interpreting dreams Joseph was possessed of; and partly to observe the remarkable steps in Providence, though secret, towards his advancement in Pharaoh's court.

Ver. 5. *And they dreamed a dream both of them,* etc.] Not one and the same dream:

each man his dream in one night; which made it the more remarkable, and the more impressed their minds, concluding from hence there must be something of importance in their dreams:

each man according to the interpretation of his dream; they dreamed each what was suitable to his office and character, and which portended what should hereafter befall them, as the interpretation of them by Joseph afterwards, and the event showed; so that it was not a vain idle dream, but divine and certain:

the butler and the baker of the king of Egypt, which [were] bound in the prison; this is added for explanation's sake, showing who were the persons spoken of that dreamed the dreams.

Ver. 6. *And Joseph came in unto them in the morning*, etc.] For though Joseph and they were in the same prison, yet not in the same ward. Aben Ezra thinks that Joseph lodged in the dungeon in the night, (^{40:15}Genesis 40:15); and was let out in the morning to wait on these prisoners; but the great interest he had in the keeper of the prison, and the favour shown him by the captain of the guard, in putting such prisoners under his care, will easily make one conclude, that Joseph now had a better lodging than that; though it had been his case, he was now provided with a better apartment in the prison; and when he arose in the morning, like a careful and faithful servant, he came to the ward where the prisoners under his care were, to see that they were safe, and what they wanted:

and looked upon them, and, behold, they [were] sad; they looked sorrowful, dejected, and uneasy.

Ver. 7. *And he asked Pharaoh's officers that [were] with him*, etc.] The chief butler and baker that were committed to his care, and with whom he now was,

in the ward of the lord's house; this seems to confirm what is before observed, that the captain of the guard that charged Joseph with them was Potiphar his master; though indeed the keeper of the prison that was under Potiphar, the captain of the guard, might be called Joseph's lord or master, but the house could not with so much propriety be called his:

saying, wherefore look ye [so] sadly today? as they were officers, who had been in lucrative places, they lived well and merrily, and expected very probably they should be released in a short time, nothing appearing against

them; but now there was a strange alteration in them, which was very visible to Joseph, and for which he expresses a concern, being of a kind, tender, and benevolent disposition, as the question he puts to them shows.

Ver. 8. *And they said unto him, we have dreamed a dream,* etc.] Each of them:

and [there is] no interpreter of it; in that place in which they were, the prison; otherwise there were persons enough in the land that pretended to the interpretation of dreams, (^{<0408>}Genesis 41:8); but they could not come at them, being in prison:

and Joseph said unto them, [do] not interpretations [belong] to God? that is, of dreams, and to him only, meaning the true God whom he worshipped; for as dreams themselves, which are of importance, and predict things to come, are of God; for none can foretell future events but he, and such to whom he imparts the gift of prophecy; so none can interpret dreams with any certainty but God himself, and those to whom he gives the faculty of interpretation of them; this Joseph said to take off their minds from the magicians and wise men, and interpreters of dreams among the Egyptians, these officers were hankering after, and wished they had them with them to interpret their dreams to them; and to suggest unto them, that though he did not arrogate such a power to himself, as having it of himself, yet intimates that he doubted not, but upon an address to his God, he would favour him with the interpretation of their dreams, and therefore encourages them to relate them to him:

tell me [them], I pray you; or “now”^{f1700}, directly, as the Targums of Onkelos and Jonathan; signifying, that he would immediately interpret them to them; no doubt Joseph said this under a divine impulse.

Ver. 9. *And the chief butler told his dream to Joseph,* etc.] He listened to what Joseph said, and paid a regard to it, and began to think he might be able to interpret his dream, and therefore was forward, and the first to tell him it at once; whereas the chief baker did not seem disposed to do it, until he observed the good interpretation given of the butler’s dream, (^{<0406>}Genesis 40:16):

and said unto him, in my dream, behold, a vine [was] before me; it appeared to him in his dream, as if a vine sprung up at once, and stood before him; which was very suitable to his office as a butler, wine being the

fruit of the vine, which he provided for the king his master, and presented to him at table.

Ver. 10. *And in the vine [were] three branches,* etc.] Which shot out from the root or body of it:

and it [was as] though it budded; the branches seemed to sprout out:

[and] her blossoms shot forth; it knotted, and the flowers of the vine appeared, which blowing off, the tender grapes were seen:

and the clusters thereof brought forth ripe grapes; all which is agreeably to the order nature observes, from the first putting forth of the vine, to its producing ripe fruit; and which in this dream immediately followed one another, as it seemed according to the representation of things to the, mind of the butler, and which he perfectly remembered, it having made a strong impression upon him.

Ver. 11. *And Pharaoh's cup [was] in his hand,* etc.] So it seemed to him in his dream, as it often had been when in his office:

and I took the grapes; from off the vine that was before him:

and pressed them into Pharaoh's cup; which some think was the custom of those times, to take a bunch of grapes and squeeze them into a cup, especially when they would make trial of what sort of wine they would produce; for it can hardly be thought that this was usually done, or that it was customary to drink such new wine; but it is more probable that the grapes were first pressed into another vessel, and so made wine of, and then poured into Pharaoh's cup, or mixed in it, though this circumstance is omitted. Indeed Herodotus^{f1701} relates of the Egyptian priests, that wine pressed out of the vine is given them:

and I gave the cup into Pharaoh's hand; as he had used to do.

Ver. 12. *And Joseph said unto him, this [is] the interpretation of it,* etc.] Of the dream:

the three branches [are] three days; signify three days, or, as Jarchi expresses it, are a sign of three days; which Joseph could know only by divine revelation; for there is no more likeness between branches and days, than between them and months or years, and bid as fair to signify one as the other, if the interpretation depended on similarity, or bare conjecture.

Ver. 13. *Yet within three days shall Pharaoh lift up thine head*, etc.] The Targum of Jonathan adds, with glory; and the sense is, either that Pharaoh would raise him up from the low estate in which he now was, to the same exalted station in which he had been before; or that he would reckon and number him among his servants, when he should take a catalogue of them, or make a new list, so Jarchi and Aben Ezra; and this phrase is used of taking the sum of persons, or the number of them, and is so rendered, (⁽⁻⁰³⁰²⁾Exodus 30:12 ⁽⁻⁰⁴⁰²⁾Numbers 4:2,22); the allusion is thought to be to a custom used by great personages, to have the names of their servants called over on a certain day, as Pharaoh perhaps used to do on his birthday, (⁽⁻⁰⁴⁰³⁾Genesis 40:20); when they struck out of the list or put into it whom they pleased, and pardoned or punished such as had offended; and this sense is the rather inclined to, because Pharaoh is said to lift up the head of both the butler and the baker, (⁽⁻⁰⁴⁰⁴⁾Genesis 40:20); yet it may be observed, that the phrases used by Joseph concerning them differ; for of the baker he says, “Pharaoh shall lift up thy head from off thee”, (⁽⁻⁰⁴⁰⁵⁾Genesis 40:19); wherefore, though the heads of them both were lift up, yet in a different sense: the one was lifted up to the gallows, and the other to his former dignity, as follows:

and restore thee unto thy place: to his office in ministering: to Pharaoh as his cup bearer:

and thou shalt deliver Pharaoh’s cup into his hand, after the former manner when thou wast his butler; which was signified in the dream, by squeezing the grapes into Pharaoh’s cup he had in his hand, and gave unto him.

Ver. 14. *But think on me, when it shall be well with thee*, etc.] He desires no reward for the interpretation of his dream, only that he would remember him in adversity, when he should be in prosperity in Pharaoh’s court, and speak a good word for him, which was the least he could do; and though Joseph knew by his own dreams that he should be raised from his low estate to a very high and advanced one, yet he thought proper, in a dependence on God, to make use of all lawful means for his deliverance; nor is he to be blamed, as if he sought help of man and not of God, as he is by some writers, both Christian and Jewish, particularly by the Targum of Jonathan,

“Joseph lost his superior confidence, and retained the confidence of men;”

whereas means are always to be used in order to the end, in subordination to the divine will; and what Joseph asked of the butler was but reasonable, and what he ought to have done for him, and was prudently moved by Joseph, as a rational method of his deliverance, and in which he was, no doubt, guided and directed by the providence of God, as the event shows:

and show kindness, I pray thee, unto me; he pleads no merit for what he had done in interpreting his dream, but puts the good office he desires him to do for him upon the foot of kindness to a man in distress, and asks it as a favour, by way of entreaty and request:

and make mention of me and bring me out of this house: the prison in which he was; for though he had much favour shown him, and had more liberty granted him than other prisoners had, yet a prisoner he was, and a prison he dwelt in, and deliverance from it was desirable, could it be had; and this was a likely way to obtain it, if the butler would speak a good word for him to Pharaoh, which he would have an opportunity to do, being often in his presence, and frequently when cheerful.

Ver. 15. *For indeed I was stolen away out of the land of the Hebrews,* etc.] Not the whole land of Canaan, so called, either from the Hebrews sojourning: in it, or from its being given unto them by God; neither of which could be a reason why Joseph, when talking with an Egyptian, should give it this name, and which, it must be supposed, was known to him; but that part of the land of Canaan where the Hebrews had sojourned for three generations, where Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob had lived, even at or near Hebron; and being persons of great note, and having done great exploits, their names were well known, and the country where they lived, and particularly among the Egyptians: now Joseph does not expose the sin of his brethren in selling him to the Ishmaelites, by whom he was brought into Egypt and sold there; only relates that he was stolen out of his native country, being taken from it without his own or his father's consent:

and here also have I done nothing that they should put me into the dungeon; since he had been in the land of Egypt, he had not been guilty of any criminal action wherefore he should be put into a prison, and especially into a dungeon, a dark and filthy place under ground, as dungeons usually were, and into which Joseph was put when first in confinement, though since took out of it: he makes no mention of the wickedness of his mistress, and of her false accusation of him, nor of the injustice of his master in putting him into prison without hearing him; only asserts his own

innocence, which was necessary to recommend himself to the butler, that he might not think he was some loose fellow that was committed to prison for some capital crime, and so it would have, been a disgrace to him to have spoken for him.

Ver. 16. *When the chief baker saw that the interpretation was good*, etc.] Meaning not that it was right and just, though it was; but that it was agreeable and pleasing, and portended good in the event; and therefore hoped a like interpretation would be given of his dream, and this encouraged him to tell it, which perhaps otherwise he would not have done:

he said unto Joseph, I also [was] in a dream; or had a dream, and in it things were represented to his mind as follows:

and, behold, [I had] three white baskets on my head; which were made of wicker, of rods that had the bark pulled off, and so were white; or which had holes in them, baskets wrought with holes, after the manner of network; though some think this denotes not the colour or form of the basket, but of the bread in them, and interpret the words, baskets of white bread, as Saadiah Gaon, and so the Targum of Jonathan, baskets of most pure bread, and the Targum of Jerusalem, baskets of hot bread; this dream was very agreeable to his office and business as a baker.

Ver. 17. *And in the uppermost basket [there was] of all manner of bakemeats for Pharaoh*, etc.] All sorts of pastry, as tarts, pies, etc. Josephus^{f1702} says, two of the baskets were full of bread, and the third had various sorts of food, such as is usually, prepared for kings:

and the birds did eat them out of the basket upon my head; all the three baskets were upon his head, but this seems to be the uppermost, which the birds could more easily come at; though if the baskets were full of holes, they might through them peck the bread with their bills.

Ver. 18. *And Joseph answered and said*, etc.] Immediately, directly, without any further thought and meditation, being divinely instructed:

this [is] the interpretation thereof; of the above dream:

the three baskets [are] three days; signify three days.

Ver. 19. *Yet within three days shall Pharaoh lift up thine head from off thee*, etc.] Order thee to be beheaded; so the Targum of Jonathan and Ben Melech interpret it,

“Pharaoh shall remove thy head from thy body with a sword:”

and shall hang thee on a tree; his body after his head was severed from it, this should be hung upon a gallows or gibbet, and there continue:

and the birds shall eat the flesh from off thee; as they usually do when bodies are thus hung up, (see ^{<20>}2 Samuel 21:9,10); this was signified by the birds eating the bakemeats out of the uppermost basket when upon his head, as it seemed to him in his dream.

Ver. 20. *And it came to pass the third day, [which was] Pharaoh’s birthday*, etc.] The third day from the time the dreams were told, and the interpretation of them given, was the birthday of Pharaoh; either the day in which a son of his was born, or in which he himself was born, as Ben Melech observes; but the latter is more probable, since the former could not with propriety be called Pharaoh’s birthday; and this might be either the day of his natural birth, or of his political birth, the time of his accession to the throne, which with the Romans was called “natalis imperii”, and was observed with feasting and rejoicing ^{f1703}, as well as the former, both among them and other nations: it is most likely this was Pharaoh’s natural birthday, which was observed among the Egyptians as birthdays were among the Persians ^{f1704}, and as Herod’s was at his court in the days of Christ, (^{<04>}Matthew 14:6); and as is usual in our times in most countries:

that he made a feast unto all his servants; his ministers of state, his courtiers, and all in his palace:

and he lifted up the head of his chief butler and of his chief baker, among his servants; that is, among his servants, when their names were called over; or at this festival, these two were taken notice of, as being charged with crimes, and their cases were looked into and examined, and their heads were lifted up in a different sense: they were both lifted out of prison, but the one was lifted up to his former post and place in Pharaoh’s court, and the other was lifted up to a gallows or gibbet, as follows; though perhaps this lifting of them both may only signify the trial of them, when they were set on high to be seen by the judge and all the court, (see ^{<20>}1 Kings 21:9).

Ver. 21. *And he restored the chief butler unto his butlership again,* etc.] Put him into the same office he was in before:

and he gave the cup into Pharaoh's hand; ministered to him in his office the same day, according to his dream and the interpretation of it: the Targum of Jonathan adds this as a reason of his being restored,

“because he found that he was not in that counsel,”

in which it was consulted to poison Pharaoh, (see Gill on “^{40:1}Genesis 40:1”).

Ver. 22. *But he hanged the chief baker,* etc.] The is, he ordered him to be hanged; because, as the same Targum says, he consulted to kill him (Pharaoh):

as Joseph had interpreted to them; the events as to both answered to the interpretation Joseph had given of their several dreams.

Ver. 23. *Yet did not the chief butler remember Joseph,* etc.] To speak of him to Pharaoh, neither on that day in which he was restored, nor for a long time after, even for the space of two years, as seems from the following chapter:

but forgot him; never more thought of him, of the favour he had done him in interpreting his dream; of the request he made to him, and of the promise which he had probably given him; which was an instance of great ingratitude, and is frequently the case and character of courtiers, who being in high places themselves, neglect others, their petitions to them, and their own promises to do all they can for them.