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## **Genesis 40**

(2019)

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Although I believe my aim is pure and God's will perfect this document is still the product of a human man, as to such I neither claim perfect knowledge or perfect understanding.

## Genesis 40.

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### Topics.

- The chief cupbearer and chief baker are put in prison with Joseph.
- The cupbearer and baker both dream a dream.
- The cupbearer tells his dream to Joseph and he interprets his dream.
- The chief baker tells his dream to Joseph and he interprets his dream.
- The dreams of the chief cupbearer and the chief bakers are fulfilled.
- A brief overview of the complete story of Joseph.

**FOR INFORMATION:** concerning people, places and the meaning of words see the title: "Map Locations and People of the Bible," and the title: "Bible Dictionary" on Website Menu.

**The previous chapter:** in chapter thirty-nine the Ishmaelite's sold Joseph to Potiphar; Potiphar made him overseer of his household; Potiphar's wife accused Joseph of sexually forcing himself upon her; Potiphar's put Joseph into the king's prison; the keeper of the prison put Joseph in charge of the prisoners and the LORD made whatever Joseph did in the prison succeed.

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### GENESIS 40:1-4

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#### The Cupbearer and Baker are Put in Prison with Joseph.

- **Genesis 40:1-4:** Sometime after this, the cupbearer of the king of Egypt (butler in KJV) and his baker committed an offense against their lord the king of Egypt. <sup>2</sup>And Pharaoh was angry with his two officers, the chief cupbearer and the chief baker, <sup>3</sup>and he put them in custody in the house of the captain of the guard, in the prison where Joseph was confined. <sup>4</sup>The captain of the guard appointed Joseph to be with them, and he attended them. They continued for some time in custody.

The words, "sometime after this," refer to Pharaoh's wife blatant lie telling her husband that Joseph came into their house to lie with her and upon hearing this Pharaoh anger was stirred and he put Joseph in prison. (Gen. 39:11-20).

**The cupbearer, (butler in KJV) and baker of the king:** (v1) the word cupbearer comes from the Hebrew word (*shaqah*) it literally carries the idea of causing to drink, (i.e. a butler). The duties of the chief cup-bearer not only involved overseeing the wine for each royal feast and the royal cellars and royal vineyards, but also overseeing the multitudes of servants who handled the wine, cared for the cellars and worked in the vineyards. The chief baker of the king had the oversight of everything relating to the provision, storage and preparing of the meats, foods and meals for the royal table. Both the chief cupbearer and baker were in ancient Egypt always men of great rank and importance and because of the confidential nature of their employment and their close access to the royal family, they were generally from the bloodline of nobles or princes. Sometime during Joseph's time in prison, the Pharaoh's chief cupbearer and chief baker came under the displeasure of their king and were put in prison with him.

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### GENESIS 40:5-8

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## The Cupbearer and Baker both Dream a Dream.

- **Genesis 40:5-8:** 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. <sup>6</sup>When Joseph came to them in the morning, he saw that they were troubled. <sup>7</sup>So he asked Pharaoh's officers who were with him in custody in his master's house, "Why are your faces downcast today?" <sup>8</sup>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."

**There is no interpreter:** (v8) the following verses shows that it was common practice in Egypt to have men trained as magicians and so-called wise men in the royal kingdom that were called upon to interpret dreams.

- So, in the morning his (Pharaoh's) spirit was troubled, and he sent and called for all the magicians of Egypt and all its wise men. Pharaoh told them his dreams, but there was none who could interpret them to Pharaoh. (Gen. 41:8).

Since the cupbearer and baker were in prison, they had no access to such so called wise men. However, when Joseph hears that they are seeking an Egyptian wise man to interpret their dreams he tells them that it is in vain that they expect their magicians and wise men to interpret their dream, because none can foretell future events, but God and those to who He imparts the gift of interpretation to. He makes it clear to them that he himself did not possess the power to interpret dreams and that it was the God he worshipped who would show him the interpretation of their dreams and then encourages them to tell their dreams to him. Joseph, observing the cupbearer and bakers depressed state inquired of the cause of their sadness; and being told it was because they had dreamed a dream and had no one to interpret it, volunteered to seek his God for the meaning of their dream. Influenced by the Spirit of God and true faith he emphasis with the cupbearer and baker and felt their anxiety and offers to interpret their dreams. Those who have the true Spirit of God dwelling within will emphasis with those that are suffering and desire to help them if they are able.

**NOTE:** the following three facts:

1. The imagery of each dream was perfectly suited to indicate the future state of the cupbearer and baker.
2. Both the cupbearer and baker had their dreams on the same night.
3. The detail of each dream is perfectly apt to the duties of the cupbearer and baker.

Very clearly show that these are not random dreams that we all have at various times during the night, but dreams that are fully under the control of God.

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## GENESIS 40:9-11

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### The Chief Cupbearer tells His Dream to Joseph.

- **Genesis 40:9-11:** So the chief cupbearer (butler in KJV) told his dream to Joseph and said to him, "In my dream there was a vine before me, <sup>10</sup>and on the vine there were three branches. As soon as it budded, its blossoms shot forth, and the clusters ripened into grapes. <sup>11</sup>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."

The chief cupbearer tells Joseph that he saw a vine with three branches that budded and blossomed and then ripened into grapes and then turned to wine after which he filled Pharaohs' cup and gave it to him to drink. The imagery of the dream is perfectly suited to the duties of the

cupbearer, wine being the produce of the crushed grapes of the vine which he provided for the king his master and presented to him at the feast table. Notice all things in this dream are positive.

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## GENESIS 40:12-15

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### Joseph Interprets the Chief Cupbearers Dream.

- **Genesis 40:12-15:** Then Joseph said to him, "This is its interpretation: the three branches are three days. <sup>13</sup>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. <sup>14</sup>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. <sup>15</sup>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."

Joseph tells the cupbearer that the three branches are three days, this clearly shows he was being divinely influenced by the Spirit of God, since there is no likeness between branches and days than between branches and months or years, and therefore there was no possible way he could know that these branches signified three days without divine revelation. He then goes on to say that Pharaoh will lift up his head in three days. In this dream the expression, "lift up your head," means that he will exalt and restore him to his previous honours, privileges and duties and that he will again give Pharaoh his cup of wine to drink as he used to do. Joseph, confident that his interpretation would prove to be true asked the cupbearer to remember him when he is restored to his position in the king's house and endeavour to procure his release.

This appeal reveals that even though the LORD was with Joseph and showed him steadfast love and gave him favor in the sight of the prison keeper and the keeper of the prison put Joseph in charge of all the prisoners and the LORD made everything he did succeed (Gen 39:21-23) he had a longing to be released.

**I was stolen out of the land of the Hebrews:** meaning he had committed no crime and done nothing deserving of his brothers throwing him into a pit. It is almost certain that during his days in prison he assured the cupbearer that his enslavement was a result of his brothers unjustified violence toward him and that he was wrongly imprisoned, because of the lies of Pharaohs' seductive wife.

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## GENESIS 40:16-17

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### Chief Baker tells His Dream to Joseph, He Interprets the Dream.

- **Genesis 40:16-17:** When the chief baker saw that the interpretation was favorable, he said to Joseph, "I also had a dream: there were three cake baskets (white baskets in KJV) on my head, <sup>17</sup>and in the uppermost basket there were all sorts of baked food (bakemeats in KJV) for Pharaoh, but the birds were eating it out of the basket on my head."

**Three cake baskets (white baskets in KJV):** (v16) could refer to any of the following three things:

1. Baskets of woven wicker-work full of holes that let much light through and therefore appeared as being white.
2. Baskets full of white bread and other foods.
3. Baskets made of wood with its bark peeled off exposing the white underneath.

**Baked food (bakemeats in KJV):** (v17) the word bakemeats in this context does not refer to literal meat of an animal, but to all types of pastry and foods in general that were the work of a baker. The circumstances mentioned in the chief bakers' dream are perfectly apt for his duties. It seems that it was only after he hears the good interpretation of the cupbearers dream that he is interested in asking Joseph to interpret his dream. It is certain he anticipated a favourable answer and this encouraged him to ask Joseph to interpret it which he otherwise might not have done.

**Three cake baskets (white baskets in KJV) on my head:** (v16) ancient Egyptian statutes and monuments show that it was the custom for men to carry baskets on their heads. In this dream the chief Baker is pictured carrying three baskets at a time on his head, one piled upon the other. The first two were most likely filled with food for the royal guests and the top one with food for the king himself. These baskets would be carried from the kitchen across the open courtyards to the royal dining room. Certain types of birds were held sacred in Egypt and therefore it was against the law to kill them, because of this it was not uncommon for hungry birds to be an annoyance to the people especially when food was carried across the open courtyards of palaces and in the cities. The birds would swoop down and with their sharp claws take the food from the baskets or wherever else they could find it.

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## GENESIS 40:18-19

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### Joseph Interprets the Chief Bakers Dream.

- Genesis 40:18-19: And Joseph answered and said, "This is its interpretation: the three baskets are three days. <sup>19</sup>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."

The expression, "life up your head," carries a double meaning, in the cupbearers dream it meant that he would be exalted, in contrast to this, in the bakers dream it means he will be beheaded. The fact Joseph was able, without any hesitation to say that the three baskets were three days again shows that he was being inspired by the Spirit of God since baskets and days have no relationship to each other. The picture is a horrifically gruesome one, firstly the baker is beheaded and then his headless body is hung on a tree usually by the highway for all to see with his head hanging next to it. This barbarism was to act as a constant warning to all who looked upon the horror to submit to the king of Egypt and obey his laws. The body would remain on the tree until it was gradually devoured by the ravenous birds. The chief cupbearers dream foretold his advancement, while the chief baker's dream foretold his death. It should be highlighted here that it was not Joseph's fault that he brought the baker such terrible news. Likewise, it is not a ministers' fault that they proclaim eternal death to those who deny God. Those who proclaim the word of God must proclaim its truth in all its fullness, both the Good News of the Gospel and the bad news of judgment and wrath to do otherwise is to be an unfaithful Stewart of God's word. The apostle Paul wrote:

- Whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. (1 Cor. 10:31).

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## GENESIS 40:20-23

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### Dreams of the Chief Cupbearer and the Chief Bakers Are Fulfilled.

- **Genesis 40:20-23:** 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. <sup>21</sup>He restored the chief cupbearer to his position, and he placed the cup in Pharaoh's hand. <sup>22</sup>But he hanged the chief baker, as Joseph had interpreted to them. <sup>23</sup>Yet the chief cupbearer did not remember Joseph, but forgot him.

The cupbearer and the bakers dream came to pass three days later on Pharaoh's birthday, the exact day Joseph predicted and exactly as he had spoken. The expression, "lifted up the head of the chief cupbearer and lifted up the head of the chief baker," can carry the following three ideas:

1. They were both lifted up out of prison.
2. One was lifted up to his former honour and duties, the other lifted up to the gallows.
3. They were both lifted up to trial to be seen by the judge and all the court.

The double meaning is most likely used to highlight the exact fulfilment of Joseph's interpretation of their dreams.

**Pharaoh's birthday:** happened to be the third day of the two dreams, this was celebrated at the royal palace by persons of nobility, ministers of state, the king's courtiers, and all in his palace with extravagant magnificence, feasting and rejoicing, and honoured by a free pardon to a selected prisoner. Joseph's interpretations proved correct, every event happened to the cupbearer and baker exactly as he had foretold. Joseph deserved the best from the chief cupbearer, but he forgot him, but as we travel through the next few chapters, we see that God's amazing plan for Joseph is not thwarted by the chief cupbearers' poor memory. The God who dwells in heaven does not forget His faithful servant and does deliver him at the appointed time.

**NOTE:** it is right and proper to celebrate our birthdays with thankfulness toward God for the mortal life He has given us and with an awareness that each birthday that passes brings us closer to our day of death which is to be looked upon as being better than the day of our birth. Worldly people consider this fallen corrupted world their home and celebrate, year after year their short life span all the while with and underlying fear and dread of the day of their death. In contrast to this a Christian has eternal reasons to celebrate the day they were born and celebrate the reality that each celebration brings them nearer to the end of their sin and the end of their sorrow and nearer to the Lord they love and to everlasting happiness.

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## AN OVERVIEW OF THE COMPLETE STORY OF JOSEPH

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When the previous chapters and the following ones are viewed as a complete whole, we see the wonder in the way in which God's sovereign purpose was brought about through:

- The wickedness of Joseph brothers to sell him to the Ishmaelite's.
- The evil workings of Potiphar's seductive wife and her sinful accusations against Joseph.
- Joseph's years of wrongful imprisonment.
- The forgetfulness of the chief cupbearer to bring Joseph to the attention of Pharaoh when he was released from prison and restored to his previous place in the royal house.

Despite all these things we see as we travel through the story that God achieves His sovereign purposes through the natural and sinful affairs of mankind. This is the wonder and mystery of the sovereignty of God. It was these evil events and sinful actions that prepared the way for Joseph to save his family from certain death due to the great famine in the land, and prepared the way for Jacob's family to go down to Egypt which ends in their deliverance by Moses, which leads to the establishing of the true

faith in the world and the spread of it amongst all nations by the Gospel. The story of Joseph is an ugly story of jealousy, wickedness, sinfulness and cruel hate that shines a vivid light upon the following four truths:

1. The wickedness of mankind's afflictions is often the direct path to the fulfilment of God's purposes
2. Mankind in their rebellion and sin often act as blind instruments to bring about God's sovereign purposes.
- 3 God's great purposes are often worked out and come to pass by the works of the wicked even though they are unconscious that they are bringing it to pass.
- 4 God's choice that Israel would be His chosen people and nation was not grounded on any merit in them, but on His sovereign purpose.

The stories undisguised openness in revelling such sins is the tone of Scripture throughout the Bible. It never attempts to hide the faults even of God's best men. It tells its story with open honesty and without showing any favouritism by covering the sins of its great kings and prophets. Whether a heavenly man or an earthly man the faults and flaws of neither are hidden. The Bible tells its story as it is in reality with all mankind's goodness and all their ugliness to bring out into the open the hidden and unseen inward nature of humanity, both the good and the bad. It does this to shine a light upon the truth that no one is without sin and that we all need a Saviour.

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*As the founder of Bible House of Grace, I would like to thank the many Christian scholars, commentators and theologians who have gone before me, and the many today, who have freely made available their works to enhance the knowledge of the Bible to all people worldwide. It is only with the help of these faithful writers that much of Bible House of Grace exists as it does today.*