

A Pair of Dreams in the Prison

Genesis 40

January 25, 2026

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God's plans often involve unexpected delays and difficulties.

I. **Although Joseph had been successful at his work in the prison, he was still forced to serve the Egyptians. (v. 1-4)**

II. **The incarcerated Egyptian officials each had a dream of their own. (v. 4b-8a)**

In the second year of his reign, Nebuchadnezzar had dreams; his mind was troubled and he could not sleep.² So the king summoned the magicians, enchanters, sorcerers and astrologers^[a] to tell him what he had dreamed. When they came in and stood before the king,³ he said to them, “I have had a dream that troubles me and I want to know what it means.^[b]”

⁴ Then the astrologers answered the king,^[c] “May the king live forever! Tell your servants the dream, and we will interpret it.”

⁵ The king replied to the astrologers, “This is what I have firmly decided: If you do not tell me what my dream was and interpret it, I will have you cut into pieces and your houses turned into piles of rubble.⁶ But if you tell me the dream and explain it, you will receive from me gifts and rewards and great honor. So tell me the dream and interpret it for me.”

⁷ Once more they replied, “Let the king tell his servants the dream, and we will interpret it.”

⁸ Then the king answered, “I am certain that you are trying to gain time, because you realize that this is what I have firmly decided:⁹ If you do not tell me the dream, there is only one penalty for you. You have conspired to tell me misleading and wicked things, hoping the situation will change. So then, tell me the dream, and I will know that you can interpret it for me.”

¹⁰ The astrologers answered the king, “There is no one on earth who can do what the king asks! No king, however great and mighty, has ever asked such a thing of any magician or enchanter or astrologer.¹¹ What the king asks is too difficult. No one can reveal it to the king except the gods, and they do not live among humans.”

¹² This made the king so angry and furious that he ordered the execution of all the wise men of Babylon.¹³ So the decree was issued to put the wise men to death, and men were sent to look for Daniel and his friends to put them to death.

¹⁴ When Arioch, the commander of the king's guard, had gone out to put to death the wise men of Babylon, Daniel spoke to him with wisdom and tact.¹⁵ He asked the king's officer, “Why did the king issue such a harsh decree?” Arioch then explained the matter to Daniel.¹⁶ At this, Daniel went in to the king and asked for time, so that he might interpret the dream for him.

III. **Joseph gave glory to God rather than taking credit for himself. (v. 8b)**

“In the beginning [Elohim] created the heavens and the earth” (Genesis 1:1).

“Bring to an end the violence of the wicked and make the righteous secure—you, the righteous [Elohim] who probes minds and hearts” (Psalm 7:9).

Then Daniel returned to his house and explained the matter to his friends Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah.¹⁸ He urged them to plead for mercy from the God of heaven concerning this mystery, so that he and his friends might not be executed with the rest of the wise men of Babylon.¹⁹ During the night the mystery was revealed to Daniel in a vision. Then Daniel praised the God of heaven²⁰ and said:

“Praise be to the name of God for ever and ever;
wisdom and power are his.

²¹ He changes times and seasons;
he deposes kings and raises up others.

He gives wisdom to the wise
and knowledge to the discerning.

²² He reveals deep and hidden things;
he knows what lies in darkness,
and light dwells with him.

²³ I thank and praise you, God of my ancestors:
You have given me wisdom and power,
you have made known to me what we asked of you,
you have made known to us the dream of the king.”

²⁴ Then Daniel went to Arioch, whom the king had appointed to execute the wise men of Babylon, and said to him, “Do not execute the wise men of Babylon. Take me to the king, and I will interpret his dream for him.”

²⁵ Arioch took Daniel to the king at once and said, “I have found a man among the exiles from Judah who can tell the king what his dream means.”

²⁶ The king asked Daniel (also called Belteshazzar), “Are you able to tell me what I saw in my dream and interpret it?”

²⁷ Daniel replied, “No wise man, enchanter, magician or diviner can explain to the king the mystery he has asked about,²⁸ but there is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries. He has shown King Nebuchadnezzar what will happen in days to come. (Daniel 2:17-28)

Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows. (James 1:17)

IV. Pharaoh’s cupbearer shared his dream and received good news about his future. (v. 9-13)

V. Joseph asked the cupbearer to intervene on his behalf with Pharaoh (v. 14-15)

VI. Pharaoh’s baker shared his dream and received terrible news about his future. (v. 16-19)

If someone guilty of a capital offense is put to death and their body is exposed on a pole,²³ you must not leave the body hanging on the pole overnight. Be sure to bury it that same day, because anyone who is hung on a pole is under God's curse. You must not desecrate the land the LORD your God is giving you as an inheritance. (Deuteronomy 21:22-23)

Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: "Cursed is everyone who is hung on a pole." (Galatians 3:13)

VII. Joseph's interpretations of the dreams proved precisely accurate. (v. 20-22)

VIII. Joseph's hopes of release were dashed when the cupbearer failed to follow through.

(v. 23)

And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who^[i] have been called according to his purpose. (Romans 8:28)