

39 When Joseph was taken down to Egypt, a certain Egyptian, Potiphar, a courtier of Pharaoh and his chief steward, bought him from the Ishmaelites who had brought him there. ²The LORD was with Joseph, and he was a successful man; and he stayed in the house of his Egyptian master. ³And when his master saw that the LORD was with him and that the LORD lent success to everything he undertook, ⁴he took a liking to Joseph. He made him his personal attendant and put him in charge of his household, placing in his hands all that he owned. ⁵And from the time

לט חמישי
 וַיֹּסֶף הַיּוֹסֵף הַיִּשְׁמְעֵלִי מִצְרַיִם וַיִּקְנֶהוּ
 פּוֹטִיפָר סָרִיס פְּרַעֲוֹה שֶׁר הַטַּבָּחִים אִישׁ
 מִצְרַיִם מִיַּד הַיִּשְׁמְעֵאִלִים אֲשֶׁר הוֹרְדוּהוּ
 שָׁמָּה: ²וַיְהִי יְהוָה אִתּוֹ וַיִּהְיֶה אִישׁ
 מַצְלִיחַ וַיְהִי בְּבֵית אֲדֹנָיו הַמִּצְרַיִ: ³וַיִּרְא
 אֲדֹנָיו כִּי יְהוָה אִתּוֹ וְכָל אֲשֶׁר-הוּא עֹשֶׂה
 יְהוָה מַצְלִיחַ בְּיָדוֹ: ⁴וַיִּמְצָא יוֹסֵף חֵן
 בְּעֵינָיו וַיִּשְׂרַח אֹתוֹ וַיִּפְקְדֵהוּ עַל-בֵּיתוֹ
 וְכָל-יְשָׁלוֹ נָתַן בְּיָדוֹ: ⁵וַיְהִי מֵאִזְּכָל הַפְּקִיד

JOSEPH IN POTIPHAR'S HOUSEHOLD (39:1-23)

1. When Joseph The narrator resumes the story of Joseph, returning to the events in the last verses of chapter 37.

a certain Egyptian The national identity of Joseph's master is repeated three times for emphasis (vv. 1,2,5), probably because the sale of Joseph into Egyptian slavery sets the stage for the enslavement and redemption of the Israelites. The prophecy to Abraham (15:13) is being fulfilled.

Potiphar The name and titles of the master are here given to draw attention to the aristocratic nature of the household into which Joseph is sold, a detail essential to the development of the story.

2. The LORD was with Joseph This crucial phrase appears four times in this chapter. It is intended to impart meaning to events that appear to be merely random. At the same time, it enables the reader to understand how the spoiled lad of 17, alone in a foreign land and in

dire adversity, suddenly begins to mature and acquire great strength of character.

a successful man The phrase expresses the idea that innate gifts of intelligence and skill cannot achieve fruition without divine support.

he stayed in the house This is the first of four stages in the rise of Joseph: he is not sent to work in the fields.

3. when his master saw Joseph's competence in fulfilling his duties—not here specified—is visible proof to the master of divine support for his slave.

4. he took a liking Literally, "Joseph found favor in his eyes." He wins the esteem and confidence of his master—the second stage in his rise.

his personal attendant This is the third stage.

in charge of his household The fourth and final rung on the ladder of success. Joseph is now overseer of the entire estate, a function fre-

CHAPTER 39

1. Joseph was taken down to Egypt Of both Abraham (Gen. 12:10) and Judah (Gen. 38:1), it is said that they "went down." This implies that they lowered the moral level of their behavior. Joseph, however, did not lower himself; he was transported against his will. The episode in this chapter shows him maintaining a high moral standard.

2. The verse can be read, "The LORD was with Joseph when he was a successful man and also when he stayed in the house of his Egyptian master." Some people are conscious of God's presence in their lives only when they are successful. When adversity strikes, they believe God has abandoned them. Joseph felt God's presence in his life both in good times and in bad times.

that the Egyptian put him in charge of his household and of all that he owned, the LORD blessed his house for Joseph's sake, so that the blessing of the LORD was upon everything that he owned, in the house and outside. ⁶He left all that he had in Joseph's hands and, with him there, he paid attention to nothing save the food that he ate. Now Joseph was well built and handsome.

⁷After a time, his master's wife cast her eyes upon Joseph and said, "Lie with me." ⁸But he refused. He said to his master's wife, "Look, with me here, my master gives no thought to anything in this house, and all that he owns he has placed in my hands. ⁹He wields no more

אתו בביתו ועל כל אשר ישלֹו ויבְרַךְ יְהוָה אֶת־בֵּית הַמִּצְרִי בְגִלְלַי יוֹסֵף וַיְהִי בְרַכְתּוֹ יְהוָה בְּכֹל־אֲשֶׁר יִשְׁלֹו בְּבֵית וּבְשָׂדֶה: ⁶וַיַּעֲזֹב כָּל־אֲשֶׁר־לֹו בְּיַד־יוֹסֵף וְלֹא־יָדַע אֶתֹו מֵאוֹמֶה כִּי אִם־הַלֶּחֶם אֲשֶׁר־הוּא אוֹכֵל וַיְהִי יוֹסֵף יִפְהַתְאָר וַיִּפֶּה מְרָאָה:

⁷וַיְהִי אַחֲרֵי הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה וַתִּשָּׂא אִשְׁת־אֲדֹנָיו אֶת־עֵינֶיהָ אֶל־יוֹסֵף וַתֹּאמֶר שְׁכַבָה עִמִּי: ⁸וַיִּמָּאֵן | וַיֹּאמֶר אֶל־אִשְׁת־אֲדֹנָיו הֵן אֲדֹנִי לֹא־יָדַע אֶתִּי מִהַבַּיִת וְכֹל אֲשֶׁר־יִשְׁלֹו נָתַן בְּיָדֵי: ⁹אֵינְנִי גֹדֵל

requently referred to in Egyptian texts as "controller" (*mer-per*).

5. the LORD blessed God brought great prosperity to the master.

in the house and outside Literally, "in the house and in the field." The phrase is a figure of speech that combines two contrasting elements to express totality.

6. in Joseph's hands Joseph has now reached the pinnacle of his career as a servant.

the food that he ate Egyptians did not eat with strangers (43:32). Thus early commentators understood the phrase as a euphemism for "wife."

well built and handsome No other male is so described in Scripture. Its insertion here serves solely to introduce the next episode.

THE ATTEMPTED SEDUCTION (vv. 7-20)

7. After a time Sufficient time has elapsed

for Joseph's high position to be accepted by him as normal and routine.

his master's wife She remains nameless.

cast her eyes upon With longing, lasciviously. There is irony here. The mistress of the house has become a slave to her lust for her husband's slave.

Lie with me There are no preliminaries, no words of love. Her demand reflects her awareness of Joseph's slave status.

8. he refused Sexual promiscuity was commonplace in all slave societies, and an ambitious person might have considered that the woman was presenting him with a chance to advance his personal interests.

He said to his master's wife Joseph explains his personal reasons for refusing her advances. First he points to the abuse of trust that would be involved, then to the violation of the husband's proprietary rights over his wife, then to the religious and moral nature of the offense.

6. Joseph was well built and handsome He inherited his good looks from his mother, Rachel, who is described in identical Hebrew terms in Gen. 29:17. The Midrash pictures Joseph as immersed in vanity and concerned with his appearance. This prompted God to say, "Your father is grieving and you comport yourself thus!" Immediately, his good looks get him into trouble and cause him to be cast into prison (Tanḥ.).

8. The Sages imagine Joseph about to yield

to the enticements of Potiphar's wife when the image of his father appears before him and strengthens his resolve to say no (BT Sot. 36b). Although Jacob had schemed and cheated when he was young, he never was guilty of sexual impropriety. The cantillation note for the word translated as "but he refused" (*va-y'ma-en*) is the rare note "*shalsholet*," which appears only four times in the Torah. It is a wavering, back-and-forth note, suggesting indecision and ambivalence on Joseph's part.

authority in this house than I, and he has withheld nothing from me except yourself, since you are his wife. How then could I do this most wicked thing, and sin before God?" ¹⁰And much as she coaxed Joseph day after day, he did not yield to her request to lie beside her, to be with her.

¹¹One such day, he came into the house to do his work. None of the household being there inside, ¹²she caught hold of him by his garment and said, "Lie with me!" But he left his garment in her hand and got away and fled outside. ¹³When she saw that he had left it in her hand and had fled outside, ¹⁴she called out to her servants and said to them, "Look, he had to bring us a Hebrew to dally with us! This one came to lie with me; but I screamed loud-

בבית הזה ממני ולא חשך ממני מאומה
כי אם אותך באשר את-אשתו ואיך
אעשה הרעה הגדלה הזאת והטאתי
לאלהים: ¹⁰ ויהי כדברה אל-יוסף יום
יום ולא שמע אליה לשבב אצלה
להיות עמה:

¹¹ ויהי כהיום הזה ויבא הביתה לעשות
מלאכתו ואין איש מאנשי הבית שם
בבית: ¹² ותתפשטהו בבגדו לאמר שכבה
עמי ויעזב בגדו בידי וינס ויצא החוצה:
¹³ ויהי כראותה כגדו בגדו בידי וינס
החוצה: ¹⁴ ותקרא לאנשי ביתה ותאמר
להם לאמר ראו הביא לנו איש עברי
לצחק בנו בא אלי לשבב עמי ואקרא

9. you are his wife The second of these reasons reflects pagan legal theory that adultery was largely a private injury, an affront and indignity to the husband.

and sin before God The third line of argument conforms to the Israelite concept of morality as having its source and sanction in divine will, not in social convention or utilitarian considerations.

10. she coaxed She does not reply to Joseph's arguments and attempts to wear down his resistance.

11. into the house Literally, "into the interior of the house."

to do his work Early commentaries have Joseph attending to his master's accounts.

there inside In that part of the house. Servants were present elsewhere (v. 14).

12. she caught hold Her pleas having failed to achieve their end, she resorts to physical aggression.

garment The loose-fitting outer garment of the well-to-do.

got away and fled Literally, "he fled (*va-yanos*) and went out (*va-yetzei*) to the outside." The first verb describes his abrupt withdrawal from the room; the second suggests the assump-

tion of a normal gait, once outside, in order not to attract attention.

13. When she saw She must have been stricken with terror over the possibility of the truth getting out. Furious over having been refused, she was hungry for revenge.

14. to her servants Literally, "the people of her house," who were in another part of the building.

Look She may have held up the coat for all to see.

he had to bring She is referring to her husband.

a Hebrew There is a clear derogatory intent here. In addressing her domestics, who are probably Egyptians, she appeals to their instinctive suspicion of foreigners, who were looked down on by the Egyptians.

to dally The Hebrew stem translated here as "dally" (*צחק*) can also mean "to mock us, insult us."

I screamed The scream was regarded as evidence of resistance to attempted rape. Hence it was a sign of innocence. She knows that none of those to whom she speaks had been close enough to hear her (v. 11).

12. Once again, a distinctive garment gets Joseph into difficulty. Once again, as in Gen.

37:23, he is stripped of his garment and thrown into a pit.

¹⁵And when he heard me screaming at the top of my voice, he left his garment with me and got away and fled outside.” ¹⁶She kept his garment beside her, until his master came home. ¹⁷Then she told him the same story, saying, “The Hebrew slave whom you brought into our house came to me to dally with me; ¹⁸but when I screamed at the top of my voice, he left his garment with me and fled outside.”

¹⁹When his master heard the story that his wife told him, namely, “Thus and so your slave did to me,” he was furious. ²⁰So Joseph’s master had him put in prison, where the king’s prisoners were confined. But even while he was there in prison, ²¹the LORD was with Joseph: He extended kindness to him and disposed the chief jailer favorably toward him. ²²The chief jailer put in Joseph’s charge all the prisoners who

בְּקוֹל גְּדוֹל: ¹⁵וַיְהִי כִשְׁמָעוֹ כִּי־הִרִימֹתִי קוֹלִי וְאֶקְרָא וַיַּעֲזֹב בְּגָדוֹ אֶצְלִי וַיֵּנָס וַיֵּצֵא הַחוּצָה: ¹⁶וַתִּנַּח בְּגָדוֹ אֶצְלָהּ עַד־בּוֹא אֲדֹנָיו אֶל־בֵּיתוֹ: ¹⁷וַתְּדַבֵּר אֵלָיו בְּדִבְרִים הָאֵלֶּה לֵאמֹר בָּא־אֵלַי הָעֶבֶד הָעֵבֶרִי אֲשֶׁר־הֵבֵאתָ לָנוּ לְצַחֵק בֵּי: ¹⁸וַיְהִי כִּהִרְיָמִי קוֹלִי וְאֶקְרָא וַיַּעֲזֹב בְּגָדוֹ אֶצְלִי וַיֵּנָס הַחוּצָה:

¹⁹וַיְהִי כִשְׁמָעַ אֲדֹנָיו אֶת־דִּבְרֵי אִשְׁתּוֹ אֲשֶׁר דִּבְרָה אֵלָיו לֵאמֹר כִּדְבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה עָשָׂה לִי עֶבְדְּךָ וַיַּחַר אַפּוֹ: ²⁰וַיִּקַּח אֲדֹנָי יוֹסֵף אֹתוֹ וַיִּתְּנֵהוּ אֶל־בֵּית הַסֹּהַר מִקּוֹם אֲשֶׁר־אֶסְרוּ אֶסְרֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ אֲסוּרִים וַיְהִי־שֵׁם בְּבֵית הַסֹּהַר: ²¹וַיְהִי יְהוָה אֶת־יוֹסֵף וַיְהִי אֵלָיו חֶסֶד וַיִּתֵּן חָנוּן בְּעֵינָי שֶׁר־בֵּית־הַסֹּהַר: ²²וַיִּתֵּן שֶׁר־בֵּית־הַסֹּהַר בְּיַד־יוֹסֵף

15. with me The same phraseology as in the report to her husband (v. 18), but she avoids mentioning that the garment was left in her hand (vv. 12,13).

and fled outside See Comment to 39:12. Again she is cautious in her formulation, because someone might have seen Joseph leaving her room and walking normally.

16. his master Not “her husband,” because it was in the capacity of slave master that she would confront him.

17. Hebrew slave This time she emphasizes Joseph’s slave status.

into our house She does not repeat to her husband the charge of attempted rape, an omission that probably saved Joseph from the executioner.

20. had him put Literally, “took him and put him.” High government officials in ancient Egypt also performed judicial functions.

in prison Imprisonment is well attested in Egypt, where each town of any size had a prison

that served as a penal institution for convicted criminals, as a labor camp for those forced into slave labor, and as the seat of the criminal court. In the present instance, the prison is under the jurisdiction of Joseph’s master and is housed on his property.

where the king’s prisoners Being an officer of the court, Potiphar puts Joseph in the section reserved for royal prisoners. There are many stories in ancient literature about the blameless man who repels the amorous advances of a married woman and escapes death.

IMPRISONMENT (vv. 20–23)

20. But even while Here in prison Joseph is at the lowest point of his fortunes. According to Psalms (105:17–18), his feet were fettered and an iron collar was put around his neck.

22. The chief jailer The jailer who is responsible to the chief steward.

put in Joseph’s charge He assigns Joseph duties not here specified.

19. he was furious With Joseph? Or with his wife, whom he suspected of fabricating her story (Gen. R. 87:9)? If Potiphar believed his wife’s account, it seems strange that Joseph’s punishment was only imprisonment in a facility for high-ranking offenders.

22. Once again, as with Potiphar and as will happen with Pharaoh, God’s favor and Joseph’s personal qualities bring him to the attention of powerful patrons.

were in that prison, and he was the one to carry out everything that was done there. ²³The chief jailer did not supervise anything that was in Joseph's charge, because the LORD was with him, and whatever he did the LORD made successful.

את כל־האסירים אשר בבית הסֹהר ואת כל־אשר עשים שם הוא היה עשה: ²³אין שר בית־הסֹהר ראה את־כל־מאומה בידו באשר יהנה אתו ואשר הוא עשה יהנה מצליח: ס

40 Some time later, the cupbearer and the baker of the king of Egypt gave offense to their lord the king of Egypt. ²Pharaoh was angry with his two courtiers, the chief cupbearer and the chief baker, ³and put them in custody, in the house of the chief steward, in the same prison house where Joseph was confined. ⁴The chief steward assigned Joseph to them, and he attended them.

מ ויהי אחר הדברים האלה חטאו משקה מלך־מצרים והאפה לאדניהם למלך מצרים: ²ויקצף פרעה על שני סריסיו על שר המשקים ועל שר האופים: ³ויתן אתם במשמר בית שר הטבחים אל־בית הסֹהר מקום אשר יוסף אסור שם: ⁴ויפקד שר הטבחים את־יוסף אתם וישרת אתם ויהיו ימים במשמר: ⁵ויחלמו חלום שניהם איש חלמו בלילה אחד איש בפתרון חלמו המשקה והאפה אשר למלך מצרים אשר אסורים בבית הסֹהר: ⁶ויבא אליהם יוסף בבקר וירא אתם והנם זעפים: ⁷וישאל את־סריסיו שבעי

When they had been in custody for some time, ⁵both of them—the cupbearer and the baker of the king of Egypt, who were confined in the prison—dreamed in the same night, each his own dream and each dream with its own meaning. ⁶When Joseph came to them in the morning, he saw that they were distraught. ⁷He asked Pharaoh's courtiers, who were with

JOSEPH IN PRISON (40:1–23)

1. Some time later Joseph is now 28 years old; 11 years have gone by since his sale into slavery. There is no way of knowing how many of those years he spent in the service of Potiphar and how many in prison.

for some time The Hebrew word *yamim* may indicate either indefinite time or "a year."

the cupbearer and the baker The following verse identifies them as the chief officials of their professions in the royal household. The cupbearer, who is crucial to the narrative, is always mentioned first. Because he personally served wine to the king, he was an important official in the royal court. Ancient Egyptian documents attest to the wealth and power of such officials.

5. both of them On the subject of dreams, see the Comment to Gen. 37:9. In this case, the two dreams are needed to establish Joseph's reputation as an interpreter of dreams.

gave offense The details, being irrelevant to the narrative, are ignored.

each dream with its own meaning Literally, "each according to the interpretation of his dream." The Hebrew can be taken to mean that the interpretation turned out to be appropriate to the content or that each dreamed as if his dream were a prediction.

3. in custody That is, in detention pending final disposition of their case.

6. distraught The anxiety normally brought on by dreams is intensified for the prisoners by the uncertainty of their fate and because they are being denied access to a professional dream interpreter. The odd coincidence of the two officials having simultaneous dreams no doubt heightens their tension.

4. The chief steward Joseph's own master, on whose estate the prison was situated.

him in custody in his master's house, saying, "Why do you appear downcast today?"⁸ And they said to him, "We had dreams, and there is no one to interpret them." So Joseph said to them, "Surely God can interpret! Tell me [your dreams]."

⁹Then the chief cupbearer told his dream to Joseph. He said to him, "In my dream, there was a vine in front of me. ¹⁰On the vine were three branches. It had barely budded, when out came its blossoms and its clusters ripened into grapes. ¹¹Pharaoh's cup was in my hand, and I took the grapes, pressed them into Pharaoh's cup, and placed the cup in Pharaoh's hand." ¹²Joseph said to him, "This is its interpretation: The three branches are three days. ¹³In three days Pharaoh will pardon you and restore you to your post; you will place Pharaoh's cup in his hand, as was your custom formerly when you were his cupbearer. ¹⁴But think of me when all is well with you again, and do me the kindness of mentioning me to Pharaoh, so as to free me from this place. ¹⁵For in truth, I was kidnapped from the land of the

פְּרַעֲהוֹ אֲשֶׁר אֶתּוֹ בְּמִשְׁמַר בֵּית אֲדֹנָיו
לֵאמֹר מִדּוּעַ פְּנֵיכֶם רָעִים הַיּוֹם:
וַיֹּאמְרוּ אֵלָיו חֲלוֹם חֲלַמְנוּ וּפְתָר אֵין
אֵתּוֹ וַיֹּאמֶר אֲלֵהֶם יוֹסֵף הֲלוֹא לֵאלֹהִים
פְּתוּרִים סְפָרוּנָא לִי:

⁹וַיְסַפֵּר שָׂר־הַמְּשָׁקִים אֶת־חֲלֹמוֹ לְיוֹסֵף
וַיֹּאמֶר לוֹ בְּחֻלּוֹמֵי וְהִגַּדְתָּנִי לְפָנָי:
¹⁰וּבִגְפָן שְׁלֹשָׁה שָׂרִיגִם וְהִיא כְּפִרְחַת
עֲלֶתָהּ נֹצֵה הַבְּשִׁילוֹ אֲשַׁפְּלֶתֶיהָ עֲנָבִים:
¹¹וְכוֹס פְּרַעֲהוֹ בְּיָדִי וָאֶקַּח אֶת־הָעֲנָבִים
וָאֲשַׁחַט אֹתָם אֶל־כּוֹס פְּרַעֲהוֹ וָאֶתַּן אֶת־
הַכּוֹס עַל־כַּף פְּרַעֲהוֹ: ¹²וַיֹּאמֶר לוֹ יוֹסֵף
זֶה פְּתוּרֵנוּ שְׁלֹשַׁת הַשָּׂרִיגִים שְׁלֹשַׁת יָמִים
הֵם: ¹³בְּעוֹד | שְׁלֹשַׁת יָמִים יִשָּׂא פְּרַעֲהוֹ
אֶת־רֹאשׁוֹ וְהִשִּׁיבָהּ עַל־כַּף וְנָתַתְּ כוֹס־
פְּרַעֲהוֹ בְּיָדוֹ כַּמִּשְׁפֵּט הָרִאשׁוֹן אֲשֶׁר הָיִיתָ
מִשְׁקֵהוּ: ¹⁴כִּי אִם־זָכַרְתָּנִי אִתְּךָ כִּאֲשֶׁר
יֵיטֵב לָךְ וְעָשִׂיתָנָא עִמָּדִי חֶסֶד
וְהִזְכַּרְתָּנִי אֶל־פְּרַעֲהוֹ וְהוֹצֵאתָנִי מִן־
הַבַּיִת הַזֶּה: ¹⁵כִּי־גָנַב גָּנַבְתִּי מֵאֶרֶץ

8. there is no one Here in prison.

Tell me "And perhaps God will reveal the meaning to me," implies Joseph.

THE CUPBEARER'S DREAM (vv. 9–15)

9. The chief cupbearer told his dream The dream is recounted in a rapid series of scenes: the grape-growing season, the production process, the serving of the finished wine.

12. This is its interpretation Joseph decipheres the dream by a scheme of equivalences. The rapidity of the action suggests imminent fulfillment. The recurrence of the number three (three days, three branches, three stages of growth, three actions performed) and the fact that both "Pharaoh" and his "cup" are men-

tioned three times, all indicate specifically three days.

13. pardon you Literally, "lift up your head," that is, you will regain your dignity and honor.

14. this place The word translated here as "place" (*bayit*) means "house." Here it is short for *beit ha-sohar*, "prison," or "the house of my master" (v. 7, 41:10). The professional diviner and dream interpreter expected to be paid for his services. Joseph, therefore, feels free to request a personal favor instead.

15. kidnapped Joseph is referring to the events in 37:28,36, stating in effect that it was the Midianites, not his brothers, who drew him up from the pit. He may have put it this way,

CHAPTER 40

8. When Joseph lived in the Land, he

dreamed of his own future greatness. In exile, he would only interpret the dreams of others (Soloveitchik).

Hebrews; nor have I done anything here that they should have put me in the dungeon.”

¹⁶When the chief baker saw how favorably he had interpreted, he said to Joseph, “In my dream, similarly, there were three openwork baskets on my head. ¹⁷In the uppermost basket were all kinds of food for Pharaoh that a baker prepares; and the birds were eating it out of the basket above my head.” ¹⁸Joseph answered, “This is its interpretation: The three baskets are three days. ¹⁹In three days Pharaoh will lift off your head and impale you upon a pole; and the birds will pick off your flesh.”

²⁰On the third day—his birthday—Pharaoh made a banquet for all his officials, and he singled out his chief cupbearer and his chief

הֶעֱבְרִים וְגַם־פֹּה לֹא־עָשִׂיתִי מֵאוֹמְהָ כִּי־
שָׁמוּ אֹתִי בְּבוֹר:

¹⁶וַיִּרְא שְׂרֵי־הָאֲפִים כִּי טוֹב פָּתַר וַיֹּאמֶר
אֶל־יוֹסֵף אֶף־אֲנִי בְחִלּוּמֵי וְהִנֵּה שְׁלֹשָׁה
סֻלֵי חֲרִי עַל־רֹאשִׁי: ¹⁷וּבִסֵּל הָעֲלִיוֹן
מִכָּל מֵאֲכָל פְּרֹעָה מַעֲשֶׂה אִפָּה וְהָעוֹף
אֹכֵל אֹתָם מִן־הַסֵּל מֵעַל רֹאשִׁי: ¹⁸וַיַּעַן
יוֹסֵף וַיֹּאמֶר זֶה פִּתְרֹנִי שְׁלֹשֶׁת הַסֵּלִים
שְׁלֹשֶׁת יָמִים הֵם: ¹⁹בְּעוֹד | שְׁלֹשֶׁת
יָמִים יִשָּׂא פְרֹעָה אֶת־רֹאשְׁךָ מֵעֲלִיךָ
וְתָלָה אוֹתְךָ עַל־עֵץ וְאֹכֵל הָעוֹף אֶת־
בְּשָׂרְךָ מֵעֲלִיךָ:

²⁰וַיְהִי | בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁלִישִׁי יוֹם הַלְּדוֹת אֶת־
פְּרֹעָה וַיַּעַשׂ מִשְׁתֶּה לְכָל־עֲבָדָיו וַיִּשָּׂא
אֶת־רֹאשׁ | שֵׁר הַמְּשָׁקִים וְאֶת־רֹאשׁ שֵׁר

though, because he was ashamed to tell others that his own brothers had sold him into slavery.

land of the Hebrews That is, the land in which the Hebrews sojourn, either Canaan or the Hebron area in which they were concentrated and were buried.

nor have I done anything Joseph assures the cupbearer that he would be intervening on behalf of an innocent man.

dungeon The word *bor* means “pit,” another term for “prison,” deriving from the subterranean nature of the place of detention (see 38:24).

THE BAKER’S DREAM (vv. 16–19)

16. openwork The Hebrew term for this (*hori*) has been explained as “a hole” or “white.” Here it describes either the baskets—“perforated,” “wickerwork”—or their contents, “white bread.”

on my head Repeated in verse 17 and of special significance for the interpretation.

17. uppermost basket The contents of only this basket are described because it was the one accessible to the birds.

all kinds The dream reflects Egyptian foods. No less than 57 varieties of bread and 38

different types of cake are known from hieroglyphic texts.

birds The baker has neither the strength nor the presence of mind to drive them away—an ominous detail.

18. This is its interpretation Joseph notes that, unlike the cupbearer, the baker in his dream does not prepare the delicacies himself; nor does he personally serve Pharaoh. In fact, the food does not even reach Pharaoh, for it is eaten by the birds.

19. will lift off your head The idiom “to raise the head” (*נשא ראש*) has the meaning of “call to account” or “bring to justice.”

impale you Impaling, not hanging, was a widely used mode of execution in the ancient Near East.

pick off your flesh The ancient Egyptians paid special attention to the preservation of the body after death. Hence, the punishment foretold here is particularly loathsome.

FULFILLMENT AND DISAPPOINTMENT (vv. 20–23)

20. singled out Literally, “lifted the head.” See Comments to 40:13,19.

16. The baker waited until he heard Joseph give the chief cupbearer a favorable interpreta-

tion and then related (or invented) a similar dream.

baker from among his officials. ²¹He restored the chief cupbearer to his cupbearing, and he placed the cup in Pharaoh's hand; ²²but the chief baker he impaled—just as Joseph had interpreted to them.

²³Yet the chief cupbearer did not think of Joseph; he forgot him.

22. just as Joseph had interpreted The narration uses the very words of Joseph to indicate the precision with which his predictions were fulfilled.

הָאֲפִים בְּתוֹךְ עֲבָדָיו: ²¹וַיֵּשֶׁב אֶת־שָׂר
הַמְּשָׁקִים עַל־מִשְׁקָהוּ וַיִּתֵּן הַכּוֹס עַל־כַּף
פָּרְעֹה: ²²וְאֵת שָׂר הָאֲפִים תָּלָה בְּאֶשׁ
פֶּתֶר לָהֶם יוֹסֵף:
²³וְלֹא־זָכַר שָׂר־הַמְּשָׁקִים אֶת־יוֹסֵף
וַיִּשְׁכַּח־הוּ: פ

23. did not think of Joseph; he forgot him The negative-positive wording is idiomatic and simply means "he completely forgot him."

23. The chief cupbearer finds himself so busy dealing with important and demanding people that he forgets his anonymous prisoner until the circumstances of the next chap-

ter lead him to remember. Perhaps because the chief cupbearer believed that he was innocent and deserved to be released, he minimized his obligation to Joseph.