

# The Story of Joseph

## *The Butler Didn't Do It*

Part 26 – September 16, 2012

Joseph has been assigned to serve the royal baker and cupbearer; through these officials, God will usher Joseph into the palace.



Just as Israel, at the first Passover, was officially ushered *out of* Egypt through an innocent lamb and the bread and wine, so too, they were ushered *into* Egypt through an innocent man and the bread and wine officials.

1,884 years later, Jesus served the Passover bread as *his body*, the wine as *his blood*.



Some versions call the cupbearer a 'butler', because he did more than pour the wine. Only high ranking nobles and bloodline princes qualified to *always be* in Pharaoh's presence and guard his food. The butler was often the king's closest confidant and most trusted advisor, the guy who could be trusted to speak the truth when no one else would. He was more family member than manservant.

Remember Mr. French from "Family Affair"? Uncle Bill is Pharaoh, Buffy, Jody, and Sissy, the royal family. He was *so proper*, it was funny just to see him have to carry Buffy's doll, Mrs. Beasley.



And then there's the baker. It's easy to feel sorry for him: "Why'd *he* have to have the bad dream and die?" Well, don't. He's a *bad guy*. He commits a crime that's *so heinous*, the punishment isn't *just death*, but having your flesh eaten by vultures *after death*; and for the Egyptians, who mummified the flesh, believing it to be needed in the afterlife, this meant *eternal suffering!* So, we have the arrogant, obstinate baker, who represents rebelliousness, and the humble butler, who represents innocence.

... the cupbearer and the baker of the king of Egypt offended [sinned against] their master, the king of Egypt. ... – *Genesis 40:1b NIV*

There's one crime that fits this punishment; the prime suspects *would be* the butler and the baker; and it's supported by a Jewish legend: attempted poisoning of the king.



Tomb of Kha, 1428-1351 BC

[A bit later, it says] Now the third day was Pharaoh's birthday, and he gave a feast for all his officials. [VIPs. Extra help. Chaos.] – Genesis 40:20 NIV

It's the perfect opportunity for a conspiratorial coup. This is a wine serving set and loaves of bread, fresh baked in 1400BC.

So, they're in prison, probably waiting for Captain Potiphar to finish investigating, and knowing their fate if found guilty.

When Joseph came to them the next morning, he saw that they were dejected. So he asked Pharaoh's officials who were in custody with him in his master's house, "Why are your faces so sad today?" "We both had dreams," they answered, "but there is no one to interpret them." – Genesis 40:6-8a NIV



Dream Book of Qeniherkhepshef

Dream decoding was big business in ancient Egypt. The wealthy had theirs professionally decoded, daily (like a daily horoscope in our culture).

This is a dream decoding manual from about 1220<sup>BC</sup>. And the interpretations in this Egyptian manual are all based on puns, and similes, and word puzzles.

Then Joseph said to them, "Do not interpretations belong to God? [He's learned that lesson first hand! So now, he opens the door for God to act (without presuming He will), by sharing his faith in a practical manner] Tell me your dreams." – Genesis 40:8b NIV

The first thing he'll do is decide if this is a "God Moment" ... or just last night's leek-and-onion stew! It's always a good idea to pause and consider whether God has ordained the moment before speaking on His behalf!

Joseph's eagerness to listen reveals a confidence in God's care and concern for his life. And the butler's eagerness to share reveals a confidence in Joseph's care and concern for *his*. Remember now, Joseph is well aware of the king's big banquet in three days, and the possibility of a pardon, and the duties of a cupbearer, from managing the vineyards to butlering the king.

So the chief cupbearer told Joseph his dream. He said to him, "In my dream I saw a vine in front of me, and on the vine were three branches. As soon as it budded, it blossomed, and its clusters ripened into grapes. Pharaoh's cup was in my hand, and I took the grapes, squeezed them into Pharaoh's cup and put the cup in his hand." – Genesis 40:9-11 NIV

Ever been mystified by a trick, learned the secret, and thought: "That's so obvious! How is everyone *not* seeing this?" Magic tricks work because our fallen nature favors complicated facts over simple truth.

God shows Joseph, what the hyper-spiritual dream decoders had completely obscured: the obvious truth of a simple dream! He's got'a be thinking, "How am *I* the *only one* who sees this? The butler *didn't* do it!"

[He can't hide his excitement] "This is what it means," Joseph said to him. "The three branches are three days. Within three days Pharaoh will lift up your head and restore you to your position, and [you'll do what you dreamed] you will put Pharaoh's cup in his hand, just as you used to do when you were his cupbearer. – Genesis 40:12-13 NIV

The butler must've thought, "That makes perfect sense! How did I not see it? You don't speak as an interpreter; but as one whose God has given true authority!" Joseph is so sure God's behind this, he makes a bold request based on the outcome.

But when all goes well with you, remember me and show me kindness; mention me to Pharaoh and get me out of this prison. For I was forcibly carried off from the land of the Hebrews, and even here I have done nothing to deserve being put in a dungeon." ["You're innocent; I'm innocent! You've done *nothing* to deserve this; me *neither!* We have *so much* in common!"] – Genesis 40:14-15 NIV

The butler had eagerly shared, having nothing to hide. But notice how the baker's guilty conscience has held him back.



When the chief baker saw that Joseph had given a favorable interpretation, he said to Joseph, "I too had a dream ..." – Genesis 40:16a NIV

Now Joseph knows, as part of the baker's daily routine, he carries baskets of bread on his head into the palace, because that's how *that's* done. And when he crosses the courtyard, he has to keep them covered, because of what's known as Pharaoh's Chickens: the Egyptian Vulture.

Funerary Procession, Tomb Meketre, c. 1975 BC



They didn't eat bread, but they didn't know that's what he was carrying without investigating ... along with *many* other sacred, protected, and filthy birds that amassed around the kitchens. On King Tut's crown is a Lappet-faced vulture. Here's a closer look from another angle. It was a blessing to have them around the palace, when they weren't picking the flesh off of a corpse.

Now Joseph also knows they're accused of a capital offense, one of 'em committed the crime, and ... *the butler didn't do it!*

... he said to Joseph, "I too had a dream: On my head were three baskets of bread. In the top basket were all kinds of baked goods for Pharaoh, but [he had left off the lid and allowed the king's food to be contaminated] the birds were eating them out of the basket on my head." [Joseph must be looking around, "*Seriously? Nobody else* can see what God's doing? The guilt is *on his head!* The chief baker, with the poison, in the Palace! *No one?*"] – Genesis 40:16b-17 NIV

“This is what it means,” Joseph said. “The three baskets are [again] three days. Within three days Pharaoh will lift off your head [This is a play on words; he told the butler that Pharaoh would “lift up” his head. He isn’t mocking the baker, just the opposite; Joseph is sharing a sober truth in a culturally relevant style. *Because* Egyptian dream interpreters relied on puns and wordplay, the baker will better receive and believe it in this manner] and hang you on a tree. And the birds will eat away your flesh.” – *Genesis 40:18-19 NIV*

Look at Joseph’s integrity! He could’ve kept his mouth shut and hedged his bets, or just said something pleasant. But God showed him the truth and gave him the moment, and he *had* to speak.



Look at God’s grace! This pagan baker is guilty, yet the One God who can save him from eternal death, reveals the wrath to come, demonstrates His own authority, and gives him three days to act! Those, whose eyes are open to the obvious, have both the joy *and* the obligation of sharing the *whole truth* of salvation.

For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. – *Romans 6:23 NIV*

We’re far more intentional about sharing the gift of life found in Jesus, than the wages of death, found in rejecting Him. We mostly leave *that* to those with less discretion and sensitivity.

Now the third day was Pharaoh’s birthday, and he gave a feast for all his officials. [To demonstrate, to these VIPs and possible co-conspirators, his benevolence toward innocence, and wrath against rebellion] He lifted up the heads of the chief cupbearer and the chief baker in the presence of his officials: He restored the chief cupbearer to his position, so that he once again put the cup into Pharaoh’s hand, but he hanged [by impaling] the chief baker, just as Joseph had said to them in his interpretation. – *Genesis 40:20-22 NIV*

Execution by neck-hanging is unknown in the O.T., where “hanging” refers to the impaling and exposing of a criminal or an enemy. Paul quotes Deuteronomy 21:23 when he says ...

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 tree.” – *Galatians 3:13 NIV*

This took place on Passover, when redemption and salvation were celebrated with unblemished lambs, unleavened bread, and red wine. And just as Joseph was assigned to the accused bread and wine officials, Jesus was assigned a place between two criminals.

Two other men, both criminals, were also led out with him to be executed. When they came to the place called the Skull, there they crucified him, along with the criminals — one on his right, the other on his left. – *Luke 23:32-33 NIV*

And just as the butler was found innocent and the baker guilty, one thief is humbly repentant while the other proudly defiant. And like the butler and the baker, one receives forgiveness, restoration, and life, while the other, eternal death.

One of the criminals who hung there hurled insults at him: “Aren’t you the Christ? Save yourself and us!” [Apparently, you can hang right next to Jesus, in your greatest moment of need, as He’s offering Himself for you, and fail to perceive it. And *that’s why those who see the obvious have to speak the truth*] But the other criminal rebuked him. “Don’t you fear God,” he said, “since you are under the same sentence? We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong.” [Really? How does *he* know? How can this criminal claim that Jesus has done nothing wrong? *What’s this guy referring to?*] – Luke 23:39-41 NIV

Those who passed by hurled insults at him ... In the same way the chief priests, the teachers of the law and the elders mocked him. ... In the same way the robbers [plural] who were crucified with him also heaped insults on him. – Matthew 27:39-44 NIV

Mark (15:32) concurs. And five times (Mt 27:38, Mk 15:27, Lk 23:32-33, Jn 19:18, 32-33) the N.T. tells us there were only two criminals with Christ. So, something *changed* in this contemptuous criminal’s heart.

Then [just like Joseph had done with the butler] he said, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.” [And then, completely *unlike the Butler*] Jesus answered him, “I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise.” It was now about [noon] the sixth hour ... [Mark (15:25) reports that they were hung on the *third hour*] – Luke 23:42-44a NIV

For three hours he watched Jesus respond to his abusers: “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.” (Luke 23:34) And suddenly, *he could see the obvious*, so he *had* to speak: “This man has done nothing wrong.” At 9:00am he’s despising, and by noon, defending! This is the power of three hours with Jesus ... *if you’re open to the obvious*.



One cross can tell of great sacrifice, but it requires two more to tell the whole story: one on His left, one on His right; death and life; rebellion and repentance; wrath and restoration.

It takes three crosses, three hours, and three days.

And when He broke the bread, and passed the cup, just as Joseph had said to the butler, *He* said to His disciples, “Remember me.”

Imagine how Joseph’s hopes must’ve soared on the third day, when his prophetic interpretations were proved to be from God! And so this chapter ends ...

The chief cupbearer, however, did not remember Joseph; he forgot him. – Genesis 40:23 NIV

I’m sure he intended to say something, but waited until *after* the party, and then until it wouldn’t be awkward, and then until Joseph was buried under the busyness of his many urgent duties. So, while Joseph waited to be remembered, once again but, sadly this time ... the butler didn’t do it. But, we can. And this is where we have to close God’s story for today.