

# Genesis 40:20

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And it came to pass the third day, which was Pharaoh's birthday, that he made a feast unto all his servants: and he lifted up the head of the chief butler and of the chief baker among his servants.

## Analysis

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**And it came to pass the third day, which was Pharaoh's birthday, that he made a feast unto all his s...** This passage is part of the Joseph narrative, a masterfully crafted account demonstrating God's sovereign providence working through human choices and circumstances to accomplish His redemptive purposes. The Joseph cycle shows how God transforms evil intentions into instruments of salvation.

Central themes include divine providence orchestrating events toward redemptive ends, the testing and refinement of character through suffering and success, forgiveness overcoming betrayal and injustice, and the preservation of God's covenant people through famine. Joseph's rise from slavery to second-in-command of Egypt illustrates how God exalts the humble and uses seeming disasters for ultimate good.

Theologically, these chapters reveal:

1. God's meticulous sovereignty over all events, even evil human actions
2. suffering as preparation for future service rather than punishment
3. forgiveness as reflecting divine character and enabling reconciliation
4. God's covenant faithfulness across generations ensuring the survival and blessing of His people

5. how present suffering gains meaning when viewed from the perspective of God's larger purposes.

Joseph's words "you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good" (50:20) epitomize biblical theodicy and providence.

## Historical Context

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The patriarchal narratives (Genesis 12-50) reflect the cultural, social, and legal customs of the ancient Near East during the Middle Bronze Age (2000-1500 BCE). Archaeological discoveries including the Mari tablets, Nuzi tablets, and Egyptian records confirm many details: nomadic pastoralism, covenant-making ceremonies, marriage customs, property laws, and international travel patterns described in Genesis.

The cultural practices reflected include: treaty/covenant forms (Genesis 15), bride-price customs (Genesis 24, 29), inheritance laws favoring firstborn sons (Genesis 25, 27), adoption practices (Genesis 15, 30), levirate-type arrangements (Genesis 38), and Egyptian administrative systems (Genesis 41, 47). These parallels confirm Genesis's historical reliability while showing how God worked within ancient cultural frameworks to accomplish His purposes.

For later Israelites, these narratives established their identity as Abraham's descendants, explained their claim to Canaan, justified their possession of Joseph's bones (Exodus 13:19), and provided models of faith despite imperfection. The patriarchs' failures and God's faithfulness encouraged Israel that covenant relationship depended on God's grace rather than human merit. The movement from Mesopotamia to Canaan to Egypt set the stage for the Exodus and conquest narratives.

## Related Passages

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**John 15:13** — Greatest form of love

**1 John 4:8** — God is love

## Study Questions

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1. What theological truths about Dreams in Prison emerge from this passage?
2. What specific changes in thinking or behavior does this verse call us to make?
3. In what ways does this narrative foreshadow or typify aspects of Christ's redemptive work?

## Interlinear Text

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וְיַיְהֵה בַּשְׁלִישִׁי וְיַיְהֵה יְמֵי H1961 birthday And it came to pass the third H3117 H7992 H3117	אֶת כָּל יְמֵי וְיַיְהֵה H3205 birthday H853 H3117
פְּרֻעַה which was Pharaoh's H6547	לְכָל מִשְׁתַּחַת הָאָרֶץ that he made H6213
וַיַּעֲשֵׂה a feast H4960	לְכָל מִשְׁתַּחַת הָאָרֶץ his servants and he lifted up H3605 H5650 H5375
רֹאשׁ אֶת רֹאשׁ אֶת the head and of the chief H7218 H8269	רֹאשׁ אֶת רֹאשׁ אֶת the head and of the chief H7218 H8269
בָּנֵן בְּאָפָּי baker among his servants H644 H8432 H5650	עֲבָדִים among his servants H4945 H853

## Additional Cross-References

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**Matthew 14:6** (Parallel theme): But when Herod's birthday was kept, the daughter of Herodias danced before them, and pleased Herod.

**Genesis 40:13** (Parallel theme): Yet within three days shall Pharaoh lift up thine head, and restore thee unto thy place: and thou shalt deliver Pharaoh's cup into his hand, after the former manner when thou wast his butler.

**Genesis 40:19** (Parallel theme): Yet within three days shall Pharaoh lift up thy head from off thee, and shall hang thee on a tree; and the birds shall eat thy flesh from off thee.

**Mark 6:21** (Creation): And when a convenient day was come, that Herod on his birthday made a supper to his lords, high captains, and chief estates of Galilee;

**2 Kings 25:27** (Parallel theme): And it came to pass in the seven and thirtieth year of the captivity of Jehoiachin king of Judah, in the twelfth month, on the seven and twentieth day of the month, that Evil-merodach king of Babylon in the year that he began to reign did lift up the head of Jehoiachin king of Judah out of prison;

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