

GROUNDS OF FAITH CAFÉ: “Genesis” (Subtitled: Is there a snake in your Garden too?) Further subtitled: Lessons from the Garden! Genesis Lesson 29 (40:1-41:56): Some Summary Thoughts:

In chapters 40-41, the despised “dreamer” of chapter 37, self-absorbed, and a thorn to his brothers and to some extent even his parents, becomes the interpreter of dreams. In the process, he is transformed from self-orientation to an others-orientation. He is no longer depicted simply as a dreamer, but an interpreter of dreams who gives God complete credit for his abilities! Scripture depicts for us a marvelous transformation as Joseph, now a man of God, moves from self-absorbed presumption to faithful and judicious care for others. This does not mean that Joseph’s life is smooth or devoid of difficulty. The portrait reveals turmoil and tension dominating the physical parts of his life. Spiritually, however, we can see immense change. God allows us the opportunity to see this man of God, who knows of God but never hears directly from God, adjust and respond to the call and claim of God upon his life – even though he has yet to discern just how or why all this is taking place in his life. One lesson at this point seems relatively clear:

- Joseph provides us with a model of faithful living, and helps us reflect upon the nature of a life lived faithfully and wisely even when circumstances weigh heavily against us.

In chapter 41, Pharaoh dreams in couplets, reinforcing the serious nature presumed for them (v. 32). Joseph not only interprets the royal dreams, he presumes to give advice in addition. In this case and in his previous interpretation for the prisoners (40:8; 41:16), Joseph credits God for his abilities. Pharaoh is persuaded and in a court teeming with magicians, sorcerers, soothsayers, and fortune-tellers, we get this phenomenal assertion from a foreign king: “*Can we find anyone like this man, one in whom is the spirit of God?*” (41:37).

- In a court full of sages, where Pharaoh himself is held to be divine, Joseph is declared by Pharaoh himself to be the one man who is the true possessor of the Divine Spirit!

A question centers around Joseph’s sense of identity. Joseph is elevated to a new position (v. 42). He is renamed by the king “Zaphenath-paneah” (meaning unknown), and given an Egyptian wife “Asenath,” the daughter of an influential priest from Heliopolis. Joseph’s prediction of famine comes true. He opens the warehouses he has prepared.

- In a way, this pictures for us God’s meaning to Abraham in chapter 12 to bless as he had been blessed. Followers of God are to be warehouses of blessings *for distribution*, not storehouses to bottle them up. A similar message is found in chapters 10-19 in the Gospel of Luke. “Wealth,” often related to issues of power and privilege is to be seen anew. As Luke records, those who store up treasures for themselves but are not rich toward God (Lk 12:21) will fail. A key message from the story of Joseph and from Luke’s Gospel is that to be Christ-like, we need to be channels of blessings, not storehouses.

Surrounded by the allure of Egyptian culture, religion and new-found trappings of royal power, we now watch to see if Joseph will be influenced more by his surroundings and change in fortunes or whether he will retain his identity from the past. Put in other words, will Joseph now let his physical surroundings or the Divine Presence dominate his worldview and outlook?

- A partial answer seems evident quite soon. He has two sons, both of whom he gives *Hebrew* names: Manasseh (causing to forget), and Ephraim (fruitful), for God had made him fruitful in the land of his misfortunes (vv. 51, 52).

Though Joseph now wears the robe of Egyptian royalty, he still carries the faith of his fathers deep within. Whether the victim or beneficiary of his environment, Joseph remains true to the call and claim of God on his life. In this, he models for us Paul’s affirmation: “*God is faithful, and He will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it*” (1 Cor 10:13).